OTHER WORLDS

DECEMBER
1952
35¢

PATTON SHAVER de CAMP

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The People Who Make OTHER WORLDS

No. 8—Alan E. Nourse

TO clear up vital statistics first, I was born in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1928, which makes me 24 years old, and technically a Midwesterner, although I've seen very little of the Midwest in recent years. After high school I entered Rutgers University (taking a couple of years out for the Navy) for a Bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences. From there I went to the University of Pennsylvania where I am now in my second year of medicine, happily and very recently married, studying and writing like mad, and wondering why days don't have forty hours in them.

I began writing for the Rutgers literary magazine ANTHO, and moved into the position of Associate Editor. About this time I started reading science fiction like a man possessed; encountered friends who led me down the primrose path, and ended up the most incurable type of stf addict — the kind that has to write it as well as read it!

Although People Who Know tell me that I'm all wrong, I use a very personal criterion for the kind of science fiction stories I write: namely, I write the kind of stories that I like to read. It's hardly an infallible system, but it's fun that way.

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....Editorial....

BY THE time you read this it will be too late. It will have been written.

Have you ever written something you've regretted, later? Like a Truman letter, or a Hamling editorial, or a check on a bank where you have no account? Well, many times we've written editorials we've regretted. The reason wasn't what we said, but what we didn't say. Funny how easy it is not to say anything, no matter how many words you've put on paper. But then again, saying something that actually means something sometimes puts you on the spot. Like for instance passing on a bit of gossip, or slapping somebody a little low on the shoulders, friendly (?) like.

You know, we've tried hard to be friendly with everybody. And our success has been remarkable. We've been up to our ears apologizing to people ever since we were born. To be blunt about it, we've had remarkably little tact. Tact. . . Somehow it seems to the brash to be just another synonym for weak-gutted. People are always "standing up for their rights." And to do that, sometimes you have to tell the "truth". Shutting up doesn't seem to be a virtue. But you can't shut up in an editorial!

How, then, do we accomplish a miracle—be tactful, be forceful, be right, and not be a puling idiot of a child who ought to be spanked?

Maybe you're wondering what brought all this on? Well, maybe it's a realization—a realization that has come to us because we took a long look at the newsstands and suddenly realized there are dozens, scores of science fiction magazines on the stands—that suddenly, as if overnight, science fiction has become a GIANT. Used to be Westerns outnumbered all other magazines on the stands. Now, believe it or not, they have competition. There may even be numerical superiority in favor of the science fiction magazines, although we haven't actually counted. The statistic actually isn't too important—but what's important is that there are a LOT of us now. We're a BIG piece of the American Scene. So big that we ought to quit acting childish. No, not mature, or "adult", or sophisticated. None of that stuff. Just calm, ordinary, everyday grown-up. Respectable—like flying saucers.

People (like myself) are inclined to go through life looking into the mirror of self-importance, until they get the idea that they are just about the only . . . no, if I say pebble on the beach, I'll shoot myself!—the

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only ego in the bunch. The only "person". All others are overshadowed. It's that great big demon called "self" (or as some put it, the Satanic Impulse Incarnated). How's that for a "phrase"? Yup, you're right, THERE'S an example of what we mean!

Satanic Impulse Incarnated indeed! Who do I think I am, to sling stuff around like that, and then look covertly at my readers to see if they admire my "cleverness"?

To be brief, the conviction that came to us as we looked at this vast mass of science fiction was that we were no longer "freaks" but just people, and as people, deserving of the respect and dignity all people deserve. Not any particular people, but the same old people we've always had around, and who have made the human race what it is—a bumbling, good-natured, happy-go-lucky group which seems to possess the knack of doing the wrong thing in the most places. True, we go about declaiming that this is the fact, and bemoaning it, but mostly we bemoan the other guy. When *he* steps out of line, we get out our yard-markers and put him back to fourth down!

In looking over this vast mass of science fiction, we found out a remarkable thing—it was GOOD. All of it. Could be better, of course, but it was *good*. And all the people in it were good. They HAD to be to achieve this grand result!

You know, as we stood there at that newsstand, we felt proud. We felt especially proud of the fact that we were *one* of many. That there were lots of guys like Gold, of *Galaxy*, Campbell of *Astounding*, Browne of *Fantastic*, Hamling of *Imagination*, Mines of *Startling*, Del Rey of *Space*, and so on, down the line. Not great guys; but real, sincere guys. Not stuffed shirts, or jerks, or idiots, but real, sincere guys. Guys *millions* of readers LIKE. So MANY guys! Well, you know now why we feel small. We have been writing editorials for years, trying to imply by our own conceited manner of writing, that these other guys just didn't have it. Not deliberately, we hope, but maybe it was pretty apparent to our readers. Well, go out and take a gander at those newsstands, and you'll realize the truth. . .they DO have it!

All of which means that we've got our work cut out for us. We've got to convince ourselves, now, that we're a part of this passing parade. We've got to attain the real sincerity we've been talking about. And what better way than to point back at our past with anything but pride?

When we plug OTHER WORLDS, we are actually plugging all of science fiction. We think we're a part of it. And since it's now such a broad field, there just isn't any peak for any one magazine or editor to stand on and take the plaudits of the multitude. Which brings us to something we've begun to suspect about the United Nations. . .

Isn't it true that the people in the United Nations, the ones who keep on stressing the phrase "citizen of

(Continued on page 107)

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The IDENTITY of SUE TENET

By Frank Patton

What would you do if you suddenly "awoke" to find you remembered nothing — except that you were a murderess — in a strange body?

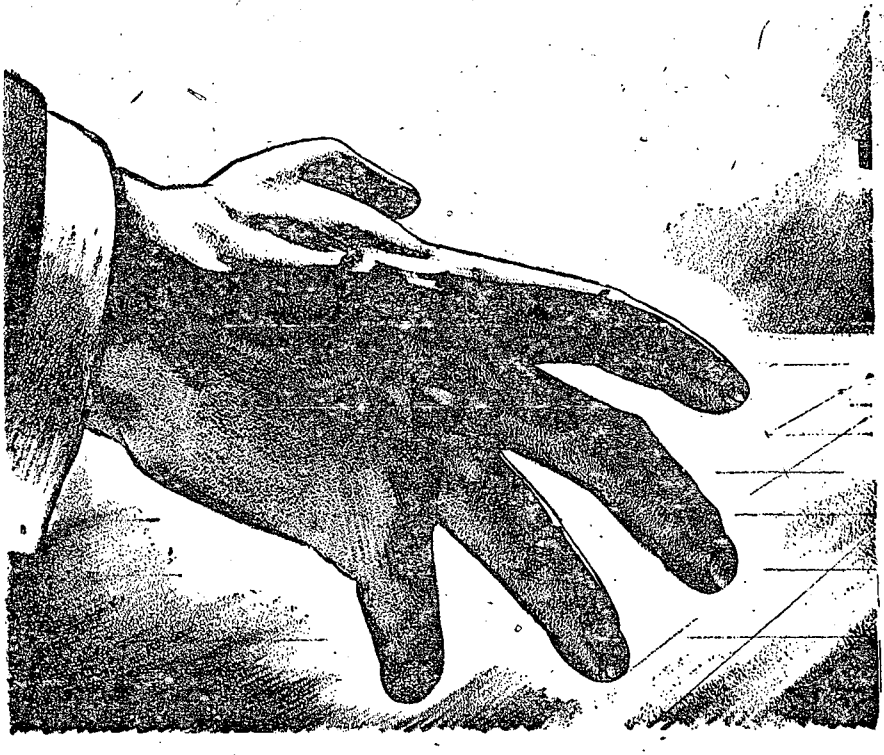

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Illustration by H. W. McCauley

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SHE was nearly replete and restored, her nude body humming with vital energy, when the power pack blew. The wild surging of unpolarized electric power nearly killed her before she struggled out of the wet harness of fine metal webbing. Naked, she staggered across to the main switch, cut off the current that agitated the fluid in the tub to a mad froth.

She stood shivering, trying to collect her shattered mental bearings. But—the damage had been done. Somewhere in the infinitely complex neuron network of her brain an important connection had burned out under the sudden overload. She didn't even know *where* she was!

She stared into the full-length mirror, beside which hung the freshly pressed uniform of a . . . what? Whatever rank she had held, she couldn't recall it! Dazedly she sat down on the three-legged metal stool, fumbled with the objects lying on the low table before it. They had obviously been placed where she could see them during her . . . bath?

A *strange* bath that was! In a fluid not water, wearing an electrical metal harness that had robbed her of her identity! She looked blankly at the harness of woven wire and the full-length tub of blue fluid.

She picked up the objects on the table one by one: a ring, the green stone cut *intaglio* with a bafflingly familiar design—a stylized hornet; a small, gray, cloth-covered book which she opened. It contained her own handwriting; she made sure by using the pencil attached by a tiny gold chain. Names, addresses — scores of them. Men and women, and after each name was a little *fleur-de-lis*, or a darkly penciled triangle. Running her eyes over the names, hoping her memory would catch some familiar hook to hang her identity upon, she sobbed in despair and terror. For all the names and addresses meant to her, they might as well be a list of . . .

A voice called from beyond the closed door: "Have you gone to sleep in that *vi-eng* unit? I've read every silly interview in this Telefan magazine. I've even memorized the recipes!"

It was a male voice, biting, impatient, a very dislikable voice she decided. It would not be hard to kill him, when the chance presented. She sat there, studying the sudden impulse to kill in her mind, amazed at the intensity of it, increasingly aghast at the character of this strange person she had become who could calmly contemplate murder. For some reason, still beyond grasp of her memory, she knew she was going to kill that man waiting so impatiently! So, she was either a murderess or a would-be murderess!

Frantically she searched the blank pages of her numbed mind for other, similar thoughts. But — for all she knew, she might have killed dozens of men! With growing horror she stared down at the names in the little gray book, suddenly grown ominous and heavy in her damp, chilled hand. They might be names of victims or

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of victims-to-be, or both!

She stood up, examining herself sharply in the long mirror. She called out: "Be with you in a minute or two—" as she stepped close to the glass, running her hands up over her sleek flanks, over her flat, clean stomach, touching her firm, round breasts. The long curves of her body were extremely beautiful, if too muscular. She could find no complaint with the care her unknown self had taken of her physique. Quite the reverse, she must be a very active, athletic sort of person.

Her face, a bewildered-eyed stranger's face, was made particularly strange to her because the skull was smooth as an egg. The balanced neck, holding the small head so proudly and defiantly, as if facing peril had become a habit, told her she was a stubbornly courageous person. The full, wide-lipped mouth, the little scar on the high curve of the cheekbone . . . startled, she looked closer. There *was* no scar! The smooth planes of her pale cheeks ran unbroken by any blemish, up into the tiny dark points of almost invisible hair-roots.

Small ears, with long lobes pierced. She fingered the tiny holes idly. Strange they should be pierced. She was sure they had never been pierced . . . still she knew the ears did not seem her own without ear-rings. It was confusing, trying to recall things, like trying to move a limb after amputation.

A good enough face, probably beautiful under the right circumstances. A woman could do a lot with that perfect cheek line, the delicious round point of the chin beneath the curve of sultry, generous lips. A nice mouth, a mouth that liked life and people and love . . . It told her too, that face couldn't possibly belong to a murderess.

ABSENTLY she began to slip on the sheer underthings, the stockings that were not stockings, but a ballet dancer's sheer, waist-length tights. Funny thing, a woman wearing a dancer's tights for stockings. She must be a dancer—yet the rest of her clothing didn't agree with that impression. The plain uniform skirt of burnt-orange with a blue side-stripe—was not a skirt. It was a pair of breeches, and she found herself slipping them on with the ease of long habit. Her hand went automatically to the little, concealed pocket where a tiny *shocker* snuggled flatly, felt reassuringly of the fine chain that hung inside the waistband, by which she could pull the shocker into her hand without a fumble. The little thing would immobilize a man with one touch of the beam; a silent *click* and he would melt down into inert flesh. How did she know that and still not know why it was there?

The uniform blouse of gray looked too tight. Her breasts would never fit inside that . . . She held it up, found the breast-band inside which obviously was to compress her too obvious charms. She slipped it on, snapped the band tight around her bust.

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A mannish tie completed the erasement of her most easily discerned difference from the opposite sex. The well-pressed jacket with the padded shoulders fit to perfection. The silver braid on the shoulder was meaningless to her, though she know it should tell her rank.

Bending forward, she rubbed her still damp scalp with a towel, then picked up the tiny, soft, blond wig. She slid it on with the ease of long practice, molded the edges into invisibility on her head with swift dabs of paste from a jar.

What in Heaven was she doing, making up like a man?

The little golden mustache was as difficult as false eye lashes, but no more so. It gave her a dashing, devil-may-care masculinity. She could love a man with a mustache like that! Suddenly she shuddered with revulsion. She *had* loved him!

That wig had been the human scalp of a man! The mustache itself was complete with the skin of a dead man underneath! A man it seemed she must have killed? Impossible! But the evidence was there; she did not have to tear the revolting scalp off and examine it. She knew!

"Clare" set the officer's cap on the shining scalp of cropped golden hair with a sharp tap, just enough of an angle to be the real "Haber's" rakish self, and her heart was turning over inside her knowing she had loved Haber, was now impersonating him. There was a horror and a fear in her with the knowing, but the curtain of her memory would lift no further.

Swiftly she pocketed the loose change lying there, the roll of green credits, the phial of transparent poison capsules, almost invisible in their terrible deadliness inside the little spring-top bottle. Just a touch, and one of the unseeable little deaths would slip into her palm. Deaths, each one could be! Probably *would* be, if she didn't stop this *creature* she seemed to be.

With cold fingers she buckled the holster about her slim waist. Cautiously her hand touched the butt of the weapon. She drew it out, pondered the exquisite design on the silver butt-plates, the mysterious double cylinder, the deadly looking muzzle. She hefted it gingerly, noting the perfect balance. It was an expensive, beautifully designed weapon. But what in the world was it? She'd never seen one before.

She stepped into the soft brown boots, tugged them up about her capable calves. *Sue Tenet* liked boots like that . . . Ah! There it was—her *own* name. But once more her memory balked. That was all. She knew her name, nothing else.

Disappointed, she turned for a last over-all inspection of her bewilderingly masculine regalia. Apparently she was a woman who habitually masqueraded as a man; she knew how so well!

Everything looked all right. She pocketed the little gray book and put on the strangely alien green ring. She walked to the door and opened it.

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THE man on the chaise longue dropped the magazine, stood up, buckled his own holster about a similarly uniformed waist. His voice was steady, a deep but cold monotone, and Sue noticed that his expression was a kind of vacuous, emotionless mask. She was unable to relate the *new* expression on his face with her past experience. She was lost in a daze of wonder, unable to remember why she was here. The man was saying in a voice vaguely and frighteningly familiar, like her own voice coming from another, a voice she knew she must obey, *would* obey, *had* obeyed since time began . . .

"We're scheduled for an operation in fifteen minutes. I've hired a sea-sled for the job, one of those with helicopter blades for limited flying. Out next move must be to eliminate Kyle Renison. Do you understand?"

The man's eyes glittered on her with a curious golden flickering in their black depths. She felt he was not at all sure of her, was only testing her out to determine her reactions and her obedience. She felt he must know she was different, but could not analyze why he should know anything had happened. She did not answer, her eyes refusing to linger on the singularly frightening face. She preceded him through the door and he locked it behind them.

As they moved down the corridor to the street, the man said: "You will obey me, just as before?"

Sue glanced at him. His voice *had* once been her own! More confused than ever, she replied with an involuntary reaction: "I will obey, Master, just as before." Before what? Before the change in her bath! Before she had been he . . . Before something of him had been her . . . She reeled dizzily, trying to understand the complexities her memory was trying to thrust out at her, but so bafflingly as to be incomprehensible.

The man was nodding. "That is good. I was not sure your nature would still coincide with my will, now that I have been forced out of your body and into this revolting male's. Obey, and I will reward you. I don't understand the strange thing that occurred in your body in the *vi-eng* bath, or I would never have taken the bath. However, it shall change nothing."

Inwardly Sue rebelled, her mind almost shouting: "That's what you think, stranger! There's been a change in me, never fear, and I understand it less than you, but when I *do* understand it . . . " Why was she so angry, so seemingly outraged? What imposition, so *personal* so *intimate* had he, no, *it*, made upon her? Inner mind raging, Sue walked calmly beside the man, schooling her appearance to acquiescence, her face registering only mild, unthinking acceptance.

* * *

KYLE RENISON, taking his usual late afternoon solitary walk along the seawall of Kingsend, watched the sea-sled windmill down,

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circle, land on the long, soft swells of the bay. Some silly stranger who didn't know it was dangerous to monkey around the seawall here near the palace. The mid-afternoon express flyer was due to zoom out of the underground hangars, through the big sea-gate and take off across those same swells! The airwash alone would overturn the sea-sled. If the rockets didn't burn them to death, the racket they made would scare them out of their wits. There was nothing he could do, he realized. If he waved, they would probably pull in closer to see what he wanted. Perhaps they'd move aside, now they'd landed . . .

But they were scudding in closer, skipping from wave to wave, coming fast, right toward him. The man was monkeying with a small black mechanical device. It reminded him of his secret model of the Hammer! But that was a silly notion; the invention was safe in the Prince's vaults under the palace behind him.

Quite suddenly Kyle decided it might be better to listen to his silly thoughts than to be dead. He turned and leaped from the top of the wall to the green sod twenty feet below, on the city side. He was out of sight of the pair on the sea-sled now, and he landed on all fours, scuttled along the bottom of the wall, straightening and running hard. His head twisted back to watch as he heard the familiar hiss and sudden blast. Impossible, but . . .

Three separate jagged bolts licked across the top of the wall he had just vacated. The light was blinding. The air crashed back together with a sullen, deafening thunder. Where he had stood as the man took aim was only a ten-foot smoking gap in the smashed seawall.

The Hammer was an excellent weapon!

Kyle, running hard toward the palace across the open lawn, realized that far better, now that his invention had been used against himself. But how had the model gotten out of the vaults and into a stranger's hands? Somebody was going to get their ears burned! He had an idea he would have to choose between telling the Prince what he thought of him and keeping his job.

Was the Prince trying to have him killed with his own invention? It didn't make sense. Not Sten Rysto, the young ruler, his sister's husband! But if *not* that, then what had happened to give the Hammer into an assassin's hand? It wasn't like Sten. He had known him all his life. It was out of character. Nevertheless, he had to know . . .

Swiftly he threaded his way through the under-corridors, up the wide, ornate stairs into the old palace itself. The Prince was probably closeted with some of his councillors, at this hour. Behind him he heard the roar of the express. Undoubtedly his would-be killers had departed, else be killed by the express. They had known where to find him, precisely; would know when the express was due . . .

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AS he expected, he found the Prince with his five councillors and his wife. He strode angrily up to face the ruddy-cheeked, youthful scion of the old and noble Rysto line.

"What have you done with the Hammer?" he demanded, anger and shock making his voice hoarse.

The Prince looked surprised, and confused, "I meant to tell you today," he said. "That's why we were having this meeting."

"You meant to tell me *what*?" Kyle's voice became low and tense.

"I've arranged to finance our needed increase in armament. I sent Captain Haber—remember you asked what became of him?—to find out what he could raise on the sale of the Hammer. I sent him to the other side of Sirius, far enough that it is certain the thing will never be used against us. We should get enough out of it to stock our treasury as well as our arsenal for any eventuality that may arise."

Kyle's greatest fear was being realized, he understood swiftly. This youngster, who ruled in place of his super-annuated father, the old King, had become over-ambitious. In possession of the Hammer, it had become possible to smash any resistance from his neighbors, change Lansea's limited monarchy over subjects who could overthrow him any time the whim struck them, to an absolute empire over the three worlds. Why else would he want new armaments on such a vast scale? There was no "eventuality that might arise . . . !"

Kyle suddenly felt consuming anger. The Hammer was his own invention, a gift to his country. This smiling pipsqueak on the big chair behind the council table had no right to sell it without first consulting him! Kyle slowly removed the decorative small sword that marked his honorary rank as a Captain of the King's Guard. He seldom wore uniform anyway, he found himself thinking as he flung the sword down across the table with a bang.

"I guess that does it, your Highness. You might as well know where I stand. I don't like things I give to my country to be traded off without even consulting me. The Hammer was to be used only to protect Lansea and the three worlds, and for no other purpose. I didn't want my work to be responsible for deaths through all the known universe. Now it will get into the hands of every would-be warlord, soon or late. Goodbye!"

As he turned away, he remembered what he had come for, turned back suddenly, his face still flaming with anger. "You have barely completed the sale of the Hammer, to a *remote* buyer, when, not fifteen minutes ago, somebody focused it on me from over the seawall. There's a nice big gap where the next tide will inundate your lawn, *Highness*." Kyle gave the title a sneering emphasis that brought a dark flush to the Prince's already florid features.

The Prince leaped to his feet, his brown eyes amazed, his handsome face portraying mingled anger, embarrassment, confusion.

"Kyle! Captain—man! The Ham-

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mer isn't sold yet! Haber only went to find out what it's worth in trading credits. I meant all the time to discuss the matter with you before the deal was actually made, but I wanted figures and facts to show you, to overcome your objections. Clare Haber was a close friend of yours, would be the last man to betray you. If someone is using the Hammer, trying to kill you, it's without the knowledge of either of us!"

Kyle's disbelief showed on his face. He turned away, his heart heavy with a sense of betrayal that no words could dissipate. That weapon could have meant certain security and peace for Lansea. Instead it was already in the hands of murderers, was going to mean new wars across the galaxy as its use spread. Only by harsh discipline and extreme care could they have kept its existence a secret. Yet, the ambitious young Prince, usurping his father's powers, had flung it out into that whirlpool of greed, the crushing, warring rivalry of the big factory planets who owned the starships, exploiting and spoiling wherever they touched.

But before he could stalk angrily from the room, he saw his sister, Alfreya, moving to intercept him. His heart hurt even more, for she must have known! Her husband, the Prince, told her everything, usually. Yet she had not told Kyle what was afoot. This conspiracy against him of the two he trusted most gave him a deep nausea. He listened to her voice with difficulty.

"Kyle, wait! We didn't tell you because we knew you'd object. We wanted to do the best thing for Lansea, for the people. There's so much the traders can give us! We wanted to show you their offer before you refused the idea, and we didn't want everyone knowing. We kept the secret, knowing it might hurt you, but waiting for Haber's return. Only the Prince and I knew where he was going, or why. The fewer to know, the safer for all."

Kyle thrust her aside with a slight push, went past her as if not recognizing her, not hearing her. He was about to make his way out of the room, but the picture of his sister's face in his mind held him there, with his back to the ruler. His effort to hold his temper, to think clearly, brought the veins out on his temples, caused the muscles on his jaw to quiver. He turned jerkily to the Prince.

"You could tell a woman your secrets, but not me! I only invented the Hammer. I've no right to decide what's to be done with it. You're not fooling me, Sten! You mean to have the traders equip you to take over the three planets under one rule, and that yours! You know I'd find a way to stand as a barrier, to thwart you. Well, have your damned war, butcher your neighbors, destroy the fifty years of peace on the three worlds! I hope you get your bellyful! I hope you stick to the advice of women, too. It'll make your success certain. Goodbye, you would-be Emperor. You can start counting your enemies now—with me as the first on the

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ist!"

Renison, beside himself, turned a bitter face to his sister's stricken countenance, standing beside him like a beautiful statue, her cheeks pale as death and her blue eyes full of hurt and held-back tears.

"As for you, Alfreya, you've worked against me for the last time. You're no sister of mine! I'll change my name! I hope I never have to look at you again."

He took another long stride toward the big double doors, but Alfreya seized his arm, held him, her voice shaking with emotion. "You don't understand, Kyle! You're jumping to conclusions, and they're as wrong as they can be. You just don't know the circumstances. *Hannigan* said the *Hornet* would get the plans from the chops one way or another, sooner or later. This was the only way we could really make sure Lansea got adequate protection from the Hornet!"

Kyle laughed bitterly. "The Hornet, the Hornet! That bugaboo! He's nothing but a ghost a tale with no substance. There's no reality behind the things that attribute to his work. So *Hannigan* knows, too. But not me! Well, how would you like it if I looked up this alleged Hornet, and roused a Hornet's nest around your ears? How would you like that, my so-called friends!"

He tore his arm from her grasp, wheeled, strode away. The Prince held out one hand in an ineffectual gesture, then called out: "When you cool off, Captain Renison, come back and get your sword! It will be waiting for you. I need you more than ever now! Haber is overdue . . . "

But Captain Renison was gone, and his sword lay on the ornate royal council table. Beside it lay a medal the Prince had just had struck for him, but hadn't time to bestow. It stated: "For services vital to the security of the sovereign state of Lansea the noble Captain Kyle Renison is given the rank of Baron and lands equal thereto, unto perpetuity."

The Prince looked sadly at his queen, sister to the angry man whose scornful words still hung on the air like the smell of sulphur. The tears ran down her face unashamedly. One of the five bearded old men about the council table coughed, blew his nose loudly.

* * *

SUE TENET and her cruel-eyed companion in the sea-sled watched the big gap the beam weapon called the Hammer had knocked from the massive stonework of the seawall.

"He's gone, damn the luck!" complained the man.

Sue wished she understood what was going on, where her sympathies should lie. She tried an indirect question: "You didn't bring me along just to watch you practice knocking holes in walls? So you missed him? So what?"

"So you'll have to kill him later, my dear. He was a friend of Haber's. Your get-up should gain his confidence long enough to . . . " the

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man gave her a look which explained his meaning fully. The shivers ran down her back at the sudden venom in his glance, the cruel meaning, at the strange kind of vaunting evident in his bearing.

Shuddering inwardly at the matter-of-fact voice in which he announced that she herself would presently murder the man who had escaped, she considered it was no time to expose the fact she didn't even know her role, or the name she was supposed to go by. It wasn't Clare Haber, because Clare Haber was dead. Yet, strangely, she seemed to *be* Clare Haber. It was all so confusing . . . Whatever desperate game she had gotten embroiled in, she would get have to wait till the information came out spontaneously. She could guess what this hard-faced creature would do with a useless burden. Even the waves slapping the bottom of the sea-sled were ominous to hear, for she realized that if the man knew the situation, it was most probable that he would just push her overboard and forget her.

The sea-sled lifted from the water, settled a few minutes later into a lagoon where dozens of the things were parked in rows along the bank. They got out, the man gesturing to an air-cab cruising by overhead.

"You'll have to attend the palace reception tonight, Sue, because Haber is already two days overdue, and we don't want to arouse suspicion. You will carry off the impersonation perfectly. There's no point in waiting. You might just as well step into Haber's place now as later. It's the only way we can make sure that there are no copies of plans for the Hammer lying around to escape our destruction. We've got to wipe out Renison and every bit of information about this weapon. Everything depends on it. We've worked too long to slip up on it now."

So her name *was* Sue! Interesting, but it didn't tell her a thing. Her memory was stirred no further. The man went on talking, and she brought her attention back with an effort.

" . . . closely, and I'll brief you. I drop you off at the palace entrance. You walk in as if the place belonged to you. You'll probably be taken at once to Rysto, and you will tell him that the model was approved by The Traders' Board of Inspection, that the demonstration was successful. You know what the Prince expects from the Traders' Interplanetary Bureau of Credit for the weapon. Tell him the model was seen by no one but the agent who approved the transaction, and the demonstration was seen by no one but the Board. Make sure he believes the deal was made exactly as he outlined it to Haber . . . how much easier this would have been if I could have retained my original hold on your body! That damned bath . . . "

The man paused, looking at her questioningly.

"I've got all that," murmured Sue, as if she'd heard it a dozen times before.

"Tell Rysto you are to take the complete data and plans and pro-

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duction details to the agent on *Sair*. He will turn in a requisition for the complete list of materials requested, which list has been gone over and approved. The agent is to give a receipt for their cost, marked paid . . ."

Sue looked out of the window of the air-cab at the peaceful city gliding beneath, wondering how long before the place fell before the efforts of such men as this one beside her. With divided attention she listened as his voice went on.

"The whole idea, Sue, is to get all the data they have in their hands, and leave. Bring the model away with you, say the agent asked for it. If you get a chance at the reception tonight, make an appointment with Renison. I doubt they could build another Hammer with Kyle Renison *out of the way*." He laid emphasis on the last words.

Sue looked at him hating the sharp jaw, the arrogant beak like a curved sword bisecting his wide cheekbones, the thin, slightly smiling lips, the dark tongue that licked perpetually out like that of a lizard, the hard, black eyes that stared at her without a single emotion ever showing about them. She hated the wide muscular shoulders that gave the lie to the impression of ill-health conveyed by the lean, pallid face. It would be so easy to kill him when the chance presented itself, she thought again, without revulsion at the idea this time.

"The Prince will be glad to see Haber alive. Be sure not to betray your sex if he embraces you. He's demonstrative and he liked the young officer. Haber was one man he trusted above all others. He knew him well. So don't talk any more than you have to. Your voice is good, and I've made it almost a perfect imitation of Haber's, just as my present voice is —key your ear to it.

"Also, there are rumors that young Haber had several lights-of-love among the palace ladies, high-placed women, wives of dignitaries who should have known better. If somebody's wife or daughter tries to invite you into her boudoir during the evening, plead illness or fatigue. Don't be left alone with any woman longer than you can help. Their eyes are too sharp! Just keep circulating, and leave as soon as possible. I'll be on hand to pull you out of any situation that might give you away."

SUE could hardly listen to the low-pitched voice, so low that the cabbie behind the protective shield of the cabin could not overhear. Clare Haber was a dead man's name, and she was wearing his shoes! A dead man's shoes and she was supposed to know enough about him to act like him perfectly! With a chill she became aware of the blond wig against her skin. Haber's own skin! And she had killed him herself! But no! It had been her mysterious alter-ego. A shudder of nausea ran through her; her stomach knotted in complete refusal of the monstrous plans of this man.

He had pulled a little vial from

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his vest, similar to the one she had in her own pocket. "If you get a chance give Alfreya one of these. I'll try for Rysto. Most of them will have to die later anyway. It could save us a lot of effort to get rid of them right now . . ."

She was thinking: whatever had brought her under this man's sway in the past, she couldn't go on! In her mental condition of confusion, she was sure to betray herself. As a spy she would automatically be convicted and executed. Her mouth opened to give an emphatic objection to the projects he seemed to accept as simple, natural deaths . . . and the grim fact of that face of his warned her, closed her mouth. Suddenly she knew something else. It had been *he* whom *she* had been! But he *thought* she was still in his mental grasp, as her body had been before the strange bath had somehow chased him out. That meant . . . She almost gave herself away as she stared at his expressionless face with new interest. The man beside her was not the man he'd been when he had been waiting for her to finish her bath! He was—whatever it was that *she* had been *before* the bath. Then who was he? Or did it matter? He—she—it . . . it was all so confusing . . . had decided to kill him already. Was he as good as dead now? There would be no electric bath to bring him back to his own body!

She couldn't tell this monster the truth now. He would simply kill her and go on with his plans anyway. Maybe, if she played her role to its end, she could somehow circumvent his plans. Her own life meant nothing anyhow, if she could not remember more than her name.

The air-cab began to settle, and her arm jerked nervously from the mounting tension within her. The man looked at her sharply. "No time to have nerves, Sue. Rysto will ask what makes you nervous. He might suspect . . ."

She shifted in her seat, leaning against him heavily. Unconsciously she found the little *shocker* snapping from its concealed pocket into her nerveless hand—it must have been habitual movement taking precedence over her conscious control, due to her confused state of mind. But now that it was in her hand, she pressed the flat nose of the little weapon to his neck, pressed the trigger.

The man stiffened with sudden, horrible jerks, an iron-hard series of muscular cramps passed over him, leaving him sitting there like a man turned to metal, quivering slightly. His agonized eyes rolled helplessly. He was as ugly a sight as she could stomach. She turned her eyes away from his face. Swiftly she went through his pockets transferring the contents to her own. She'd have to examine them at her leisure.

She leaned forward, touched the cabbie's shoulder after pressing aside the little hinged window of plastic. Not trusting her voice to sound masculine, she pointed down to the streets sliding below. He nodded; the air-cab sank swiftly down. As it lit

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softly on the green turf beside the walkway, her confidence came back, and gruffly she explained.

"My companion has had an epileptic attack. It's a mild recurrent attack he has once in awhile, nothing serious. But it means I will have to change my plans. Will you take him to this address—?" she handed the cabbie a card she had taken from the man's pocket. She hadn't the faintest idea whose address was on it, but it would serve to get him out of the way.

She hesitated, fumbling with the green credit notes in her breeches pocket. She had no idea of the value of the notes, or what the cabbie expected. She peeled off two, handed them to the man without glancing at them. He looked startled, but she kept her eyes away from his, knowing she had overpaid him, not knowing what to do about it. Perhaps, if she seemed to have made a mistake, his cupidity . . .

The man put the bills in his coat pocket, saying hurriedly: "Sure, officer, I'll tend to your friend. Don't worry about a thing . . . "

She stepped from the cab and he lifted it out of sight so quickly she knew he was afraid she'd discover the mistake she'd made in the amount she'd given him. Those credits must represent a lot of buying power. Not like . . . her mind fumbled with a vague memory of another roll of bills, comparatively worthless, and of exchanging them for a tiny basket of food. But the memory faded before she could pin down the details.

She turned away, starting off with a brisk stride. Suddenly she realized her hips were swaying. How tell-tale the motion must look! She stiffened, paused, started over with a military heel and toe action; some dull memory repeating tonelessly in her mind: " . . . a little more pigeon-toed, not such short steps . . . "

A tall, uniformed figure loomed suddenly from the gathering dark. A heavy hand gripped her staggeringly by the shoulder. "You ingrate! What did you mean by taking off without a word to me? You knew bloody well it was my invention!"

SUE looked at the heavy, muscled throat, her eyes somehow refusing to rise higher. She forced them up, up to the big, ruddy and angry face, handsome as the Devil, with heavy golden eyebrows shading the deep-set green-blue eyes. It was a face with flushed and angry cheeks that she knew was usually kindly, a face she could want to see very much.

She couldn't stand the strain any more. Inadvertently she put out a shaking hand to his arm to support her quivering knees. He looked such an honest, reliable sort, even if he was angry, even if his eyes did bore into hers as if he hated the sight of her. She found herself muttering, whispering, words tumbling over each other desperately. "I've got to talk to someone; you'll have to do. I *know* you're my friend; and I'm sick, I need you. Can we go somewhere for a drink? I need

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a drink . . . what is this place?"

The big blond face lost its flush of anger, a sudden sympathy struggling to replace it. Concern spread over the big-boned features and a huge hand gripped her hard.

"What's happened to your voice, man? You sound like you've been through Hell! Don't tell me anything could happen to take the ginger out of Clare Haber? I never knew you to have any emotions but a thirst for anything to vary your fare of excitement. Sure, I'll buy you a drink, just to find out what you did with the Hammer!"

"I know what happened to the Hammer," muttered Sue. "But I don't know how it happened. I don't even know my own name, for sure. I'll tell you all about it, but get me under cover. I'm scared . . . "

The big man kept his grasp on her arm, piloted her along at a rapid pace, talking.

"I'll take you to my quarters over on the square. We can be alone there, and it's only a half-block away. No one'll notice us in this gloom. The lights aren't on yet."

Sue said no more until they had reached the sanctuary of the officer's quarters. It was a huge single dwelling. She wondered idly what he did to make use of so much space. As he let her in to the front door, the question was explained, for the whole first floor was taken up with a clutter of gadgets and machinery, mostly in a state of disassembly. Some of it was only half out of packing cases, the rest inexplicably dismembered and lying about in a jumble.

He led her through the maze without comment, seeming to think she knew all about the place, and up a flight of stairs to the second floor. Here she found a luxuriously furnished apartment, a man's place with the skins of jaguars, leopards, the gray wolf of Wancir, and animals whose skins she had never seen before, littering the floor in lieu of rugs, thrown over big chairs, tacked on the walls. It was evident, even without considering the racks of rifles and other antique arms over the wide fireplace, that this man was an inveterate hunter and collector of firearms of all kinds. She could only guess at what the insane assembly of apparatus on the lower floor meant in his pursuits, unless he was a gadget collector whose efforts were aimed at having one of everything the mind of man had ever produced.

THE big man closed the door, put his back to it. Sue walked across the fur-littered floor, sank weakly into the depths of a huge divan covered with a great white fur of what animal she did not know. The weakness left her limbs after a long moment, during which the officer just stood there, his back against the door, watching her without expression. Then he paced across the room, swung about, paced back again, his big hands clenching as if some intense thought gave him pain.

"Why did you do it, Clare? I gave them the Hammer, and they, and you, sell me out without a word!

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The three people on earth I love and trust, and they betray me!"

Sue looked at him blankly. Her lip quivered, her mind weary of puzzles. She felt the tears on her eyelashes and surprised in her vague mist of thought a strong desire to *be* a woman, to be *glad* she was a woman and could leave her troubles to some man to solve.

Slowly her lips moved, against a powerful fear impulse, and she managed to say: "I'm *not* Clare Haber! I don't know what you're talking about!"

With her hands still trembling a little, she fumbled a cigarette from the plastic box on the table, managed to light it. Not until then did she glance up to see what impression her announcement had made on him.

He was standing there glaring at her like a crazy man. The words came out in a torrent—angry, hurt words. "I've been through a lot today, Clare. I can't stand any jokes right now! I want to know what you've done with the Hammer, and I don't want any damned jests! I've just given Rysto my sword. I'm through with Lansea for good. But before I leave the planet, I want to know what you three are up to, and why you betrayed me? I might want to enlist with the Hornet myself! He might at least give be a square deal. That's more than Rysto gave me!"

Sue blew a ring of smoke from the cigarette toward him, smiled slightly at his somehow very boyish and appealing attitude. She was more herself now; the stranger's confused mental attitude steadied her. She was aware that her own thoughts were less clouded with emotion than his, what there were of them. The fact gave her confidence. That and something the word Hornet had suggested.

"I'm *not* Haber, and I can tell you that you do not want to go to the Hornet. I just quit the Hornet myself, I hope permanently."

The officer seemed goaded to greater fury by her calm. "You lie!" he snapped. "The Hornet is a fiction, a monster that doesn't exist. If he does, he isn't what some say he is." He bent over her, gripped her shoulder until she nearly shrieked with the pain of his steel fingers. "You sold out the Hammer to the Hornet?" he said hoarsely. "The Hornet has the Hammer?"

She was unable to answer against the fear of his fury. He shook her, snarling.

"Your silence is an admission! You sold out to the Hornet, and you dare to come to me as a friend! Haber, I'm going to kill you! With these two hands I'm going to choke the life out of you, here and now!"

Desperately she tried to wriggle from his grasp. Why did this thing keep getting out of hand? All she had to do was tell him who she was . . . but she didn't even know for sure.

The big hands closed about her throat, she felt the crushing force. Only one thing could save her — prove she wasn't Clare Haber, the man whose hair and mustache she wore. Weakly she tore at her jacket and loosened the mannish shirt, then,

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with a convulsive effort she threw herself back, spread the jacket wide.

FOR an instant the pressure from his terrible hands increased, then the awful grasp relaxed and he stumbled back, reeling, numbed into complete confusion by the revelation of her sex.

With nerveless hands she massaged her throat, gasping and choking. As her breath returned, she saw that he had stumbled back over a big leather hassock and was sitting on it, still staring at her bared bosom. With some impish impulse to complete his discomfiture, she stood erect, tugged off the blond wig, shook off the jacket and shirt, ripped off the mustache, then spread her arms wide and made quite she he knew she was not Haber. She had grown to hate the thought of that name.

"Now perhaps you will let me explain myself, Mr. . . . whatever your name is." She stopped as a new realization struck her. "You must be Kyle Renison, the inventor of the Hammer!"

He shook his head like a swimmer coming up from a dive. "Well, for the love of Hannah! The coxscomb is a woman! And I never knew . . . "

Irritated at his stupidity, she rapped out: "Wake up, you silly jackass! I am not Haber. I was never Haber. I never hope to be Haber. I don't know my own name, but it is certainly *not* Clare Haber. If you will come to your senses, I'll try to tell you what I know—what little there is to tell that makes sense."

"And such a damned pretty woman too."

She slipped on the shirt, ignoring him for a moment. But she did not snap the tight band in place again. She slid down onto the divan, the weariness sweeping over her in waves. Stumblingly her voice began her account, and as she spoke, memory was seeping back into her being, so that even her own voice held wonderment as it went on.

"Up to this minute I didn't know who—or what—the Hornet was. My mind is numb, like a limb long unused, but I think it will get better quickly. I only know that I was dancing, somewhere, when he—it—came. I can vaguely remember a glittering mist, a strange vibration, humming electrically. It hovered over me, settled about me, entered into me. Since then I remember nothing.

"But today I suddenly found myself in a strange room, standing shivering beside a strange bath of blue liquid and an electrical web of wires. I had apparently been in the bath, been shocked by some energy that had gone wrong. I knew that I had nearly been killed. I was standing naked, as barren of memory as a new-born babe. I didn't know my name, didn't recognize my body, did not even know the use of the various things about me. Apparently my clothes were beside the bath. They fit me, they were a man's clothes, and they were obviously a disguise my body used regularly. I didn't know how the weapon, in my holster worked. I knew only that I was alive,

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was a female, and spoke in a man's voice.

"I put on the clothes because it seemed that it was the natural thing to do. My hands went through motions evidently practiced, but totally new to my mind. Outside the door of that room a voice, identical with mine, urged me to hurry. Finally dressed, I went into that room and found . . . him!" She shuddered at the recollection.

"Even then I had the eerie feeling he wasn't human. Then began a confusion in my mind that hasn't cleared up yet. He said he'd been me, that I was Sue, and also Clare Haber, that Clare Haber was dead—"

Kyle tensed. "Dead!" he said. "Who killed him?"

Sue's face grew pale. She faced him, lifted her chin. "I suppose I did," she said. "In fact, I *know* I did, while the Hornet had possession of my body!"

He glared at her, his fists clenching and unclenching, but he made no move to get up from the hassock. "Go on," he said hoarsely. "You are being very interesting, but I warn you, unbelievable."

"How can I expect you to believe," she murmured in horror, "when I myself cannot bring myself to believe what my memory is beginning to tell me? If I am to believe that, I have killed many men, poisoning them while I charmed them with my body . . . "

She slumped down and put her face in her hands, and sobs of terror shook her shoulders as the memories flooded in. But he remained seated, impassive, still staring at her with complete unbelief written on his face.

She went on: "I have not really been alive. It seems that I have been waiting, like a soul in a grave, waiting for life to start again. And now that it has, I cannot remember who I was. I remember a name, yes. I was Sue Tenet, I believe I *am* Sue Tenet. But who was *she*. I can tell you nothing more about me.

"But I can tell you two things important to you. One, the Hornet is not a human being, but some alien creature of pure force. Two, the Hornet means to destroy human rule here, and use the people of these three worlds for his own purposes."

Her voice stopped, and they sat looking at each other with a kind of mutual animosity; she angry at his unwillingness to accept the story she had told him, as expressed by his unbelieving face; he by what he considered her clumsy effort to lie to him.

"All right," she flared at him. "Believe what you will—but the least you can do as a gentleman is get me that drink you promised me!"

He flushed, got to his feet. "I need one myself," he said briefly, going to pour it. He returned in a moment carrying a brimming glass with a square of ice tinkling in it. She sipped the liquid, her eyes watering with the sting of it. In a moment she felt the glow of the liquor in her stomach, her blood began to flow normally again, and her trembling nerves relaxed.

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"HOW did you get here?" he asked. "Might as well embellish the story. If you're telling anything of the truth, you'll be consistent. If you talk long enough without tripping yourself up . . . "

"How can I be consistent when I can't even be sure of my name?" she snapped. "But I came here on a sea-sled, and to the street where you found me in an air-cab . . . "

"Some one shot at me from a sea-sled this afternoon!" he interrupted suddenly.

"I was on the sea-sled that shot at you," she continued, her mind fumbling blindly, wishing instantly she hadn't said it. The anger began to flush his cheeks again, and he put his glass down abruptly, and his fingers twitched. She went on hurriedly. "With the man who was waiting for me to finish that strange electrical bath—he called it a *vi-eng* . . ."

He snorted, sardonically. "If you were taking a vi-eng bath, you needn't act so innocent . . . "

"Why? What does it do?"

"Do?" He stared at her, flushed again. "Never mind what it does . . . if you *don't* know, which you should, having been *in* one!"

"I told you I don't remember anything prior to finding myself standing beside it."

"Go on," he said. "Say that enough times, and I'll begin to believe it."

"The man outside my room seemed to think he might not have control of my mind, be able as before to command absolute obedience. So he seemed to be testing me. Because I was in such mental confusion, I pretended to agree with everything he said. I was desperate for any clue that would tell me what I was, where I was, and who he was, and so on. To test me, he said, we were to go on a sea-sled somewhere and kill a man named Kyle Renison, inventor of something he called the Hammer. I didn't know what the Hammer was until he *used* it. He had it right in the sea-sled."

"For a woman who wants to live, you aren't telling a very sensible story," he reminded her. "But maybe you're not so dumb at that . . . "

"You mean, if the lie is big enough . . . "

"Something like that. But so far, in the matter of the sea-sled and the attempt on my life, you're strictly on the side of truth. For that reason alone, I'd be willing to believe you. Another is the stories I've heard of the Hornet. You have come closest to making sense out of them."

"Telling the truth to you is dangerous," she said. "Maybe if I went on, you'd kill me anyway."

"Don't worry, I don't kill women."

She felt of her throat and murmured, "My throat will be sore for weeks."

He laughed suddenly. "Case of mistaken identity," he said.

She laughed too, then picked up the blond wig. Unable to repress a shudder, she thrust it into his hands. Her voice took on a harsh note of horror. "All right, then. That, I'm sure, is the scalp of Clare Haber. The mustache I was wearing is also

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is. I suspect that *I* poisoned him, hat *I* scalped him, that *I* tanned he skin, and that *I* practiced for nonths to pass myself off for him— nd when I did it, *I* was the Hornet. Jow, with that horrible lie, you may vant to kill me, woman or no! Oh, i it only was a *lie!*" Suddenly she roke down, and once more her houlders shook with the horror that vas in her, and dry sobs of terror hook her.

Suddenly his arms were around er shoulders protectingly, and his eep voice rumbled in dismay. "Stop ," he said. "Don't say another word. Jnless you can lie! I've had enough f the truth! Enough to believe you o the hilt."

She relaxed, letting her hands sink own on the white fur. He released er awkwardly, and sat beside her, taring at her. He was so tall, beside er, that he looked down at her. Forgive me," she said. "I'm just o scared . . . "

"How'd you get away from the Iornet?" he asked suddenly.

She showed him the little *shocker.* With this. I just pressed it against im in the air-cab and pressed the rigger. Then I had the cabbie take im to an address on a card I found n his pocket. I said he'd had an pileptic fit, but that it wasn't anyhing serious, and that he'd be all ight."

"Do you remember the address on he card?"

She shook her head. "I never even ead it, except to note it was an address . . . "

"What was the number of the cab?"

"I don't know that either."

He exclaimed in vexation. "Just like all women!"

She looked up at him, almost in tears again. She put her hands to her smooth-shaven head, at which he was glaring from his height. "T-tell me," she said pathetically, "is . . . is a bald woman as attractive as one with hair on her head?"

For an instant he looked down at her in surprise, then suddenly he grinned. His big square teeth were surprisingly white in his tanned face. His expression told her all doubt of her had been removed. He looked at her head critically. "If you want my personal reaction, it's a damned intriguing innovation. But I hate to think of the stubble when you let it grow again! Ugh!"

She rubbed her hand over the smooth scalp in alarm. "It hasn't begun to grow yet?" she asked. "I could have it depilated . . . "

"Why?"

"I . . . I didn't like the sound of that 'ugh'," she said lowly.

He laughed, then turned serious, his eyes on hers showing an intimate new acceptance she found very pleasant. "We don't have time for this! That fiendish friend of yours is liable to recover from his shock treatment and set out to do some of the things you were supposed to help with. By the way, what were they outside of killing me?"

She told him all the Hornet had said to her in the air-cab. He whis-

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tled. "He really means business, doesn't he! We've got to stop him!" He got up, stood before her, thinking.

"How can you stop a thing like that?" she asked faintly.

He snorted. "I don't believe he is a 'thing.' I think this invisible creature is a delusion, born of the shock of the vi-eng unit short circuiting. I think when you learn the truth, you'll find you worked for a gang of murderers and cutthroats under threats. I could have your friend picked up, if I hadn't thrown up my commission this afternoon. I'm sorry now, but what's done is done. I can't turn back . . . "

She asked, "Why not? Changing you mind is legal, isn't it?"

He looked at her, as if plunged into deep thought by her words. A thought struck her, too, and she trembled. "Maybe you're right," she said. "But if this Hornet memory I have is a delusion, I'm mad! If I'm mad, I've been a tool of a gang, someway, and can't remember what has happened. If I killed young Haber . . . " her voice dropped into a hopeless resignation to an impossible situation. "If I *am* that kind of thing, I hope I never remember what really happened!"

He stared at her.

"I'm scared!" she said. "Very frightened. I could still be shot for having Haber's clothes, for being a spy. I don't want to be given the third degree for something I can't even remember, which somebody else *may*, if it's true. How could I deny it, even if I wanted to, if *you're* right?"

His big voice became reassuring. "Don't worry. You'll not fall into Hannigan's clumsy hands if I can help it. He's our Chief of Intelligence and I've always felt distrust of him. Chiefly because of his stories of the Hornet, fantastic things, almost as fantastic as yours . . . " He stopped speaking and looked reflective, frowning slightly. He looked at her. "I don't know . . . " he began. Then abruptly he turned and switched on the visiphone against the wall. As he dialed a number, she got up suddenly, moved out of range of the pickup eye above the visiscreen.

ON the screen a whirl of rainbow colors showed the screens synchronizing. From the kaleidoscopic display a woman's lovely face came into view suddenly. The lips moved, the machine said: "Kyle! My brother! I knew you couldn't go through with it. We love you, Kyle! We were only trying to spare you unnecessary worry and strain . . . "

Kyle interrupted. "No time for that, Sis. Will you get over here right away? I've something important to show you. It will change the whole picture for us. Something damned important, Alfreya. Hurry!" He broke the connection.

Kyle picked up the blond scalp from the chair, handed it to Sue. "Prepare to receive visitors as Captain Clare Haber," he said.

Sue put on the wig, shuddering as the cold, dead skin of the human

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wig touched her scalp. Her lips twisted into an involuntary grimace of horror as she faced the mirror, patting the grisly thing into place. Then she affixed the mustache, removed her tunic, and rearranged her disarrayed blouse, careless of Kyle's intent gaze beyond a slight reddening of her white neck. Swiftly she bound her full bosom into mannish appearance with the strap and replaced the jacket.

"I hope you don't have to wear that much longer," Kyle said. "I must admit that I like you as you really are much better. Now that I've got time to notice, I'm beginning to get impressed with your looks."

"I wish I didn't have them!" she said furiously.

"Why?" He looked at her with astonishment.

"That memory of mine—that remembers only so little—*does* remind me how many men have died *because* they noticed the same things you now do!" All at once she was on the verge of tears once more.

He leaped to her side, grasped her in his arms and shook her gently. "Here, enough of that. How can Captain Haber convince a woman he is a man, with tear-stained eyes?"

"It is necessary?"

He shrugged. "Maybe not. I hope we don't have to use you as any further decoy. But how am I going to convince Alfreya of your story without first showing her something unusual?"

"Wouldn't she believe you?"

"Me, yes. But I want her to believe you!"

She looked at him bleakly. "Again, is that necessary?"

He considered her a minute. "You're sure in a black mood," he said. "Look at it this way. You've won me over, and maybe we can do something to uncover the gang back of you. If it is a gang . . . And in that event, you'll be clear, I guarantee it. And if it is that fantastic soul-stealer, the Hornet, as you believe, it may be that the entire resources of this planet may be able to do something about it. If it wasn't for Hannigan's fantastic reports of the past . . . "

"Then you *do* believe my story, and not your theory of a gang who has used me as a hypnotized slave?"

He grimaced. "Against my common sense," he said. "Maybe *I'm* being hypnotized too—by your beauty."

She winced and he looked annoyed at his lack of tact.

ALFREYA arrived at that moment, and as she swept in, Sue looked at her with interest. She came in without ceremony, evidencing that she was accustomed to visiting her brother. She was perhaps twenty-five, perhaps thirty, strikingly handsome in the same big-boned way that was her brother's.

She halted in the doorway, clasped her hands together in delight. "Clare Haber! Now, here's an errant messenger with some explanations worth hearing! Man, we've been worried sick ever since you left, thinking some leak might have given away the

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value of the object in your baggage!"

"Some leak did!" said Sue, in Haber's voice.

Alfreya turned to Kyle, noticed the unsmiling, grim face turned toward her. "Oh," she said, disappointment in her face. "I had the instant hope when I saw Clare that you had been wrong about being fired upon by the Hammer. Then a peculiar look came over her face and she turned back to Sue.

She moved between Sue and Kyle, peering closely at Sue's face. But Sue beat her to it, realizing it would be better if her first impression were of voluntary exposure of the deception. She reached up and pulled off the wig.

"Ah!" said Alfreya. She rubbed her eyes with one hand, then sat down suddenly. No one spoke for several moments, then Alfreya ejaculated: "A woman!"

"You're pretty good, Sis," said Kyle. "I had to see a lot more than a bald head to realize that fact."

Sue's bald head turned pink, but no pinker than her face.

Kyle sat down, while Alfreya got up and walked over to Sue. She reached out and touched Sue's cheek with a fingertip, then her shoulder, noting the padding, turned her about like a woman buying a dress on a model. Then her eyes went to her brother's face, completely puzzled.

"Naturally I need a very good explanation of this fantastic deception," she said.

Kyle looked at Alfreya somberly. "This is going to be rather hard to swallow, Sis. But maybe if you remember some of the crazy reports Hannigan has made to us about that mysterious entity called the Hornet, you may be able to gather some of the loose threads together . . . "

"The Hornet? A ghost! A myth! A phantasy in the minds of the superstitious natives of the moons of Wancir!"

He winced. "I was afraid you'd look at it that way."

"Isn't that the way you've looked at it?" she prodded him.

"Oh," he said. "Ribbing me, eh? Well, maybe you aren't so hard to explain to at that." Kyle looked at Sue. "Neither of us know, exactly, Sis. She had an accident while in a vi-eng conditioner . . . "

Alfreya's eyelids went up, and then dropped again as she noted no reaction from Sue. She looked a bit more puzzled.

But Kyle blushed for Sue. He hastened on, flustered. "The unit overloaded her mental circuits, blew a fuse, so to speak. She lost her memory. She doesn't even know her own name, for sure. Circumstances bear out that part of her story . . . But she had a kind of delusion of an invisible being called the Hornet possessing her, driving her from her body, using the body for many months. She's sick, scared—she needs help."

He paused a moment, then plunged into it. "What tops it is the fact that her wig was manufactured from Haber's own scalp. When our enemies begin scalping our top diplomatic men, starting with our most

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brilliant tactician, we're in trouble! She may be an agent of the enemy, whoever he or they may be, but she isn't a willing one. We're in deadly peril right now!"

"Will you help us hunt your friends down?" asked Alfreya of Sue.

"I'll do what I can," said Sue. "But you may not like the result if we are successful—and I don't see how we can fail to locate the Hornet. He said he would kill you all—and no doubt that now includes me."

Alfreya went to her, clasped her warmly in her arms, giving for the first time the acceptance she had mentally given almost from the first. "You come with me. I once lived here with my brother; some of my things are still here. I can get you some woman's clothes, although they will be too big. We'll find something to fit you tomorrow."

Sue brightened and Alfreya looked at her approvingly. "You're a pretty child," she said. "What is that name you remember?"

"Sue Tenet," said Sue. "I'm not even sure of that . . ."

Alfreya cocked her head on one side. "Are you a dancer?" she asked abruptly.

Sue looked her astonishment. "Why yes! I remember dancing . . . "

"You are Mazarinda, of the Ballet! So that is how Haber fell into the clutches of the Hornet! He was in love with you, planned to marry you when he came back from his mission. It was his secret, and he told only me about it!"

Sue went pale, and once more she found herself wrapped in Alfreya's arms. As she began to weep, uncontrollably, Alfreya and Kyle looked helplessly at each other.

"KYLE," said Alfreya, "you'd better call Hannigan. Get him over here so we can begin the search for the Hornet. We've got to find him! And the rest of his gang!"

As she left the room with Sue, Kyle turned to the toggle switch of the visiphone and flipped it open. In seconds the visiphone screen began its warming up display of chromatics, and then Kyle dialed a number.

A burly, red-faced figure appeared on the screen and an incisive, rasping voice barked out suddenly. "Who's calling? What address?"

Kyle stepped in front of the pick-up eye, looked into it grimly. "This is Renison, at home. Something bad's up, Hannigan. A group of spies headed by the Hornet has stolen the Hammer, killed Haber, and they are now making plans to destroy the plans and kill everyone who has any knowledge of the Hammer. If they get away with it, it's the end for the three planets!"

"A lot more than that!" came the rasping voice. From the visiphone came the sound of barked orders. Then the voice directed at Kyle again. "Any clues?"

"Yes. The Hornet himself was knocked out with a shocker by a woman agent of his, who broke his hypnotic control and escaped, and he's been taken to an unknown address in the city by an air-cab driver."

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"Good! I'll get the driver easy enough. If only our quarry stays at the address long enough for the driver to get us there . . . " Hannigan's voice was gone, and his image with it. He had gone into the rapid-fire action characteristic of him, neglecting even to sever the visiphone connection.

HANNIGAN arrived at Kyle's laboratory with a very perturbed look on his face. He listened gravely to Kyle's story, then accompanied him up to his apartment. He spoke: "I have a lot of highly unreliable information about the Hornet, and it's quite fantastic. Maybe it's a red herring type of information, I don't know. But if that dame with your sister is one of the Hornet's agents, hypnotized or not, I'm going to have some very serious discussions with her . . . "

Kyle shook his head vigorously. "Oh no you don't! She'll stay right with Sis till this is cleared up. She's no criminal. She's a victim herself. Moreover, she's sick. She is suffering from amnesia, and she has delusions. She thinks the Hornet is an invisible being that lived inside her, possessed her body, drove her own entity out. She didn't know her own name till Sis called her Mazarinda."

Hannigan looked startled. "Mazarinda! Working for the Hornet? He doesn't care who he picks on! So poor Haber stopped in to see his lady love before he left on his long trip—and that's as far as he got!"

Kyle looked at Hannigan curiously. "Sis thinks she's the only one who knew about Haber and Mazarinda . . . "

Hannigan grinned. "I know lots of things people don't think I know. That's why I'm head of Intelligence." The Police Chief rubbed his massive red nose and his little blue eyes squinted up at Renison's green ones. He gave a little cough. "Has it occurred to you, Renison, that your permier danseuse might be a lot safer with me than mingling with your highbrow friends? They might kill her, if they know she can identify some of the gang."

Kyle held the man's eyes, his smile unchanging. "No go, Hannigan. I know your methods. She'd be likely to die with you, from too much questioning! Besides, I'm convinced of the truth of her story, and no amount of questioning would help if that's the case."

Hannigan's eyebrows lifted. "You *believe* her story of the weird force taking over her body and expelling her own ego?"

"You've said things almost as fantastic concerning the Hornet," said Renison. "By the way, what was your source of these amazing claims?"

"My secret," said Hannigan. "What kind of an Intelligence head would I be if I didn't have sources?"

"Then let's prove how good you are, and find the Hornet before he comes out of the effects of the shocker treatment Miss Tenet gave him."

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THE notables of Lansea, forming the Royal Council, gathered bout the conference table in the pri-ate room behind the throne room of ie palace. At the table head sat the rince, his cheeks pale, his lips set stubborn lines. Kyle, too nervous sit, strode up and down the room hile the Prime Minister sat beside ie visiphone, waiting for a report.

"Until we hear from Hannigan, iere's little we can do," said Sten ysto. "We're up against the fact iat we don't know where the Hor-et bases his operations. It's well nown, according to Hannigan, that iere have been secret groups form-ig with a hornet as their emblem, a all three planets. Especially on Vancir, the water world. Now we'll ave to grub them all out and de-roy them. And we can do it with ie Hammer, when Hannigan tells us here to strike."

"Where is the man?" asked Kyle annoyance. "Is he out personally unting cab drivers . . . "

"Of course not," came Hannigan's ooming voice, rasping at them from ie doorway. "I've just come from iat address the cab driver gave ie . . . "

"And . . . ?" Sten Rysto rose in is chair.

"Our bird has flown the coop."

Kyle looked at Hannigan. "You're till looking for him."

"No."

Sten Rysto bounded to his feet. *Why?* Man, why?" His face was ie picture of perfect surprise. Kyle tenison's brows lowered as he star-ed at Hannigan in consternation. Also there was puzzlement there. Hannigan wasn't given to such dra-matics. Undoubtedly there was some-thing more to be said, and Hanni-gan was trying for effect.

"There must be more to say," Kyle remarked.

"Of course there is," agreed Han-nigan. He had a strange aura of com-placency about him, an air of self-con-fidence that was not like the usual demeanor of the Chief of Lansea's Intelligence Service. Usually Hanni-gan was a gruff, rasping, dissatisfied-with-everything personality.

"Out with it, man!" said Rysto. "This is a serious matter, and we've not time to waste with words."

"I didn't catch my bird, but I did find out where he's gone, and how to get him—this time for good!"

Sten Rysto stood for an instant more, then sank back into his chair in relief. "That's better," he said. "And where is this Hornet person?"

"On Wancir, the Water World. He's made it his base of operations, and I've got his headquarters pin-pointed. We're taking off with the whole fleet immediately, with every Hammer that's been made so far, and blasting it out of existence!"

Kyle's eyes suddenly narrowed and he sat down too, silently and warily, watching the Intelligence Chief.

Sten Rysto sat with open mouth. "You sure of your information?"

"Positive. I'll prove it by bring-ing back the goods. All I need is your order to ready the fleet, and we're off."

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"The order is given!" snapped Rysto, jumping back to his feet. "And the sooner we take off, the better. I'm not much to stomach battle, but I won't rest until that mysterious body and power thief is a corpse!"

Kyle opened his mouth to say something, but before the words could come out, a tremendous roar came from outside the palace and the building shook.

"What's that!" asked Sten Rysto in sudden alarm. Together with Kyle, he rushed to the window. Outside a tremendous black cloud spurted skyward, hung lazily, growing huge and black like an instantly created thundercloud. A shuddering series of heavy concussions shook the palace again, and explosions thundered in their ears. Rysto cried out: "The weapon shops! The Hornet hasn't gone, Hannigan! He's gotten the weapon shops, and the plans he wanted!"

Hannigan faced the ruler as he whirled about. "Not the Hornet, but a time bomb," he said. "I didn't expect that, I'll admit, but I'm positive the Hornet has left the planet . . ." He produced a series of photographs from his pocket. They were still damp. "These are from the observatory. Take a look at them . . ."

Kyle grabbed them from Hannigan's hand, stared at them. They showed a long, slim object, plunging through space, undeniably a spaceship—but of a strange appearance, even in the photo. The nose of it was surrounded by a flickering radiance, as of radioactivity, a halo of force like nothing he'd ever seen before.

Rysto, looking over his shoulder, said: "That's like no ship I ever saw before."

"Yes, and that's my proof. It was taken early this morning, just before I pulled my raid on the Hornet's temporary hideout. If you doubt my word, call the chief astronomer . . ."

"I don't doubt it," said Rysto. "Let's get that fleet under way. We've got to get this thing before it gets us!"

"We'll need every punch we've got," said Hannigan. "Every Hammer completed and installed. And Kyle should go along, too. He knows most about the Hammer, and how to use it effectively. I'm not sure of what we'll find on the Water World, and what we'll have to do to make the Hammer most effective there."

"Of course he'll go," said Rysto. "We'll put every bit we have into this attack. If we lose, we'll be finished . . ."

Once more Kyle opened his mouth to speak, then a peculiar look crossed his face, and he clamped his jaws tight for a moment. Then he spoke: "Of course, I'll go," he said. "And don't worry that the Hammer won't do the job—if Hannigan has the Hornet's base pinned down as he says."

"You'll captain your own ship, the *Star Swan*," said Rysto. "Hannigan will take command of three of the remaining six ships, and I will head the other three."

"And the sooner we take off, the

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better," said Hannigan meaningfully.

Kyle saluted, whirled on his heel, and left the palace. But once outside, he did not head for the great naval spaceport, but instead turned toward the summer home of his sister, Alfreya . . .

HE found Alfreya with her arms around a weeping Sue Tenet.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"She just remembered some more of her past while possessed by the Hornet, and the experience has shaken her."

Kyle looked pained, but he said: 'I've no time now for talk about it, because something important has happened . . . "

"You mean the destruction of the weapon shops?"

"Not that, alone. But Hannigan says he knows where the Hornet is, and his base, and he's persuaded Sten to attack with the whole fleet and all available Hammers. I'm to command the *Star Swan*. We will take off within hours, I'm afraid."

"Why are you afraid?"

"Because I think Hannigan's a traitor—is working with the Hornet!"

Alfreya looked shocked. "Oh, no! Not Hannigan. He's the soul of loyalty. Rough and rasping, but not a traitor!"

Kyle looked grim. "The only way I can prove it is to go with the fleet and watch for treachery. If it develops, maybe I can do something about it."

Sue Tenet drew away from Alfreya now and rushed to Kyle, flung her arms around him. "I can remember now, Kyle! The Hornet is not a human being at all! You were wrong in telling me I had delusions from shock. He came to me as I was dancing, as a little, burning cloud of dusty blue radiance. His touch was pleasant, but somehow terribly frightening, like a pleasant, but deadly poison. He liked me, settled into me, took over my body. There was nothing I could do about it, and soon I began to slip away, further and further into the background, until I became only an observer, detached and distant, it seemed, yet still somewhere in my body, but helpless to control it even the slightest bit.

"Then I lived, a stranger in my own body. It belonged to him. My will was not even used. It began to atrophy. I remember how I used my body to lure many men into death traps, to help the Hornet set up his base of power here on Lansea. I remember Clare Haber, how he loved me. I didn't love him, but the Hornet made my body respond to him, and the night he proposed to me . . . " Sue's voice broke, and tears came afresh.

Kyle tried to disengage her clinging arms from him, but she clung tightly. Her voice went on, becoming more hysterical now as new memories flooded in on her.

"I murdered men with poison! And at last, I was supposed to murder you, Sten Rysto, and Alfreya . . . it all comes back to me. But then, in the vi-eng bath, the short circuit

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drove the Hornet from my body. He is a sort of fluid energy that lives in a fluid environment. In the body, it must be the blood . . . After that I was free! The energy drove his strange corpuscles from my body. . . ."

Kyle tore her arms from about him, thrust her back into Alfreya's care. "Take care of her. Give her a sedative. I've got to go. She's given me the clue I need . . . and I've got to work on it before we go to attack the Hornet's base!"

Without further attention to the two women, one distraught and almost hysterical, the other puzzled, afraid, and vastly saddened by the terrible events transpiring about her, Kyle rushed off.

* * *

AT the spaceport, the *Star Swan* became the center of the activity of some two hundred mechanics, busily installing apparatus strange to the warship in her weapons section. Giant generators were hooked up, supplying far more power than the Hammer armament the ship carried required. A huge tank of blue fluid was installed, and placed in it were a series of fine-mesh copper screens, connected to the generators. These in turn were connected to the gleaming snouts of ordinary ray-cannon barrels, and equipped with spray-type nozzles. Then, this section of the weapons deck was sealed, and Kyle Renison himself took the keys.

An hour later, the seven ships of the Lansea space navy took off for Wancir, with Hannigan's ship in the lead and Kyle's *Star Swan* taking up the rear, not without prearrangement on Kyle's part by the simple expedient of making his first take-off attempt a false one, necessitating another too-late to take anything but the rear position in the armada.

* * *

WANCIR was a water world in truth. As Kyle's ship neared it, it became evident that it was a vapor-wrapped world of gigantic seas, with here and there a group of tiny islands, with mountain peaks jutting from the waves. Nothing lived on the seas or in them except monstrous salamander-like creatures as large as whales, and on the southern hemisphere, where the greatest number of islands, bleak and forbidding, rose from the sea, nothing lived but insects. It was in the northern hemisphere that the human colonies were, cut off from the south by the almost impassable seas of the Water World.

As the fleet screamed into the atmosphere of the southern hemisphere, radio contact was established between the control rooms of the seven ships. Hannigan's rasping voice cut from the receiver into Kyle's ears like a knife.

"The Hornet's nest is somewhere among these islands, in a large peak, which has been hollowed out by the action of the water millions of years ago. Inside, I have discovered, is a fleet of ships. If they are permitted to be armed with Hammers, our bat-

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tle will be lost. But now, we have a chance to wipe them out."

"How are you going to find the right island?" came Sten Rysto's voice.

"All we have to do is drop a bomb near the suspected location, and there are only two or three which could possibly be the correct location, and his ships will swarm up to repel our attack."

"Let's get to it, then," growled Kyle.

For answer, Hannigan's ship dove down, loosed a bomb on a large island topped by a gigantic peak. Kyle watched from his vantage point at the rear of the fleet, and was perhaps the first to see the opening in the mountainside from which the nose of a space ship peered. Then, as it came screaming up on a pillar of flame, Kyle Renison sent his own craft roaring across Wancir, away from the tiny island. Then, making a great curve, he came back in.

"What's that crazy maneuver?" asked Sten Rysto, over the radio.

"Just backing you up, in case," said Kyle cryptically.

"In case of what . . . ?" began Rysto, but in that instant, he learned what. Out of the rising ship came a strange blue radiance that dissolved suddenly into a swarm of thousands of little clouds of light that moved through space exactly like a swarm of hornets. They headed for Rysto's six ships with incredible speed.

With a curse, Sten Rysto ordered his ship into action, and the brilliant and deadly bolts of the Hammer streaked down. Where they passed through the oncoming swarm of luminous hornet-lights, they caused a ripple of movement, a slight deviation in their course, but when they hit the rising Hornet ship, it exploded in a coruscating shower of fireworks that sprayed down on the mountain in a rain of fire.

Then the luminous hornet-swarm reached Sten Rysto's ship—and the other five ships an instant later. There was an instant as the hulls glowed with lumination as the Hornets passed within, then the radiance was gone. In close, perfect formation the fleet of Sten Rysto sped down toward the mountain cave and swept into it, to disappear inside.

Kyle Renison had no time for emotion, or for attack. His radar showed quite plainly the side of the mountain into which the fleet had swooped like homing swallows. His dive toward the same spot was uncalculated, almost a reflex of anger. His orders to his crew were: "Blast that cavern shut, every Hammer on that mountainside until the opening is buried!"

In the ensuing minutes, thousands of tons of rock effectively sealed the cavern opening. And then Kyle withdrew into space to think, and to plan what he would do next—if there was anything to do!

* * *

BACK on Lansea, two stunned women stared into the television screen that revealed the disaster that had overcome Sten Rysto and his

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fleet. Sue Tenet, wearing a becoming black wig, was sobbing. "You see, the Hornet is not human. He is a strange form of energy from outer space. He is perhaps the advance guard of a strange form of liquid light that has life, and which breeds in the bodies of its victims. I seem to know a great deal about the Hornet and his civilization, something impressed on my memory cells by association while I was under his control. It seems to me it is this way—the Hornet is sexless, but in each victim, some little portion remains, even when the victim is dead, which grows and becomes another Hornet. But they cannot take over our mechanical world without slave bodies to occupy. You have just seen that the Hornet now has many slave bodies, and many slave ships, and worst of all, all our Hammer weapons. When they have completed control of their new hosts, the big attack will come. And once they gain control of a planet, we will all be mindless slaves, robot bodies with our souls driven into a tiny corner, helpless and trapped."

Sue Tenet turned away from the television screen, her face buried in her hands in her grief.

Alfreya switched on the space radio and called repeatedly into the void. "Kyle! My brother. Can you hear me? Kyle . . . "

* * *

KYLE, deep in thought as he hovered just beyond the atmosphere of the water world, became aware of the insistent signal from the radio, indicating that the wave band was being activated. He snapped the set on, and heard the faint voice of Alfreya. "Yes," he answered. "I am listening . . . "

"We saw . . . " said Alfreya. "Sten is gone, and Hannigan . . . "

"You mean the Hornet . . . Hannigan *was* the Hornet," said Kyle. "I suspected it when he first came back from his raid on the Hornet's hideaway. He conducted a raid, all right, but it was the Hornet who came back, in Hannigan's body. And now he's got Sten and all the crew of those six ships. Each and every man is now another Hornet, and sooner or later they'll come out of that mountain . . . "

"Kyle!" came his sister's voice. "You can't fight them alone! Your weapons will be useless against such a thing as that. The Hornet is an energy parasite, and not vulnerable to physical weapons such as the Hammer."

"It's our only chance," said Kyle hopelessly. "I've got one weapon, a revamped vi-eng unit, stepped up a thousand-fold. I got the idea from what Sue told me about how the unit chased the Hornet out of her. I'm going to wait for these things to come out, then I'm going to give them a vi-eng bath they may not find to their liking."

"They are too many for you," said Alfreya. "But if you can hold out until help comes . . . "

"What help is there?"

"Kyle, as queen of Lansea, I know a few things you do not. One is that

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we are members of a Federation that spreads through the galaxy. There is a battle fleet of thousands of gigantic ships, ready for real emergencies, such as this weird energy thing from deep space. It will take several weeks for them to get here, but I am calling them in."

"They'll do no good, without such armament as the vi-eng bath," said Kyle in sudden hope. "Listen, Sis, can you take down some complex mathematics and relay it with your call for help? If those battle wagons can build vi-eng projectors as they come, they'll have a weapon to drive the Hornets out, and thus have some chance—but more, they must devise a vi-eng *net* to capture the Hornets after they are disassociated from the bodies of their slaves. Here's how it might be done . . ." Rapidly he began reeling off an array of figures until a despairing voice came from the radio:

"Kyle! I can't make sense out of that! I'm not a scientist, like you. I'm going to call the Federation and tell them what they face, and trust to their scientists to devise something."

Kyle spoke rapidly. "Maybe you're right, Sis. Just tell them of the vi-eng bath—they surely know what that is—and tell them how I am using it in a projector. Then tell them they'll need a net thousands of miles in diameter to imprison the Hornets. The rest will be up to them. I hope their science is as great as their Federation."

"I'll do it," said Alfreya, "and do your best, Kyle, to hold them until help gets here." She broke the connection.

* * *

TWO weeks later Kyle's vigil over the blasted mountain came to an end. Like a volcano the mountain erupted, and the cavern was blasted open from the inside. Up from the depths came three of the ships of Sten Rysto, and they drove directly toward Kyle Renison's *Star Swan*.

Kyle shouted into the intercom and alerted his crew, then shut his lips grimly and turned his ship toward the coming battle, in his heart a silent prayer.

As he had hoped, the adapted vi-eng unit was a surprise to the Hornet, and as the four ships closed, he went into action, firing all his Hammers in unison with the vi-eng projector. One of the Hammers jolted its deadly bolt into the belly of the first attacker, and the ship exploded. But as it tumbled down, blue radiances began to escape from it. However, they seemed tiny, and they fled back down into the mountain.

"Young ones!" muttered Kyle.

Now a bolt from Kyle's ship struck another of the enemy, and it staggered, veered away crazily. Then a flash came from the third ship, leaping toward the *Star Swan* like the lightning of doom. It struck the ship on the nose, blew it off. In his control room, Kyle found his ship unanswerable to his commands, the controls ripped away. But he fired his vi-eng projector and saw the third

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enemy ship bathed in the violet glow of the vi-energies. Then as he drifted helplessly, he saw dozens of tiny blue radiances drift through the hull to speed through space toward the *Star Swan*.

In a matter of minutes they would reach the ship, and the *Star Swan's* crew would follow Sten Rysto into the mountain, slaves of the Hornet. Desperately Kyle raced to the weapons room, obsessed with an idea that had come to him almost too late. On his way he yelled for the crew, and they came with him, eager to devise something to protect them from the onrushing Hornet menace.

Kyle roared at a big, hairy-armed lieutenant: "Our only hope—short that vi-eng unit into the hull! Then turn it on. We'll all get an experience we won't forget, but it may save our lives. Those three ships are out of commission . . . "

Together they wrestled with the projector, wrenched it from its mounting, turned it on the hull. Then Kyle turned on its energies. Instantly the hull was bathed in the violet light, and instantly he and his crew felt the exhilarating effects of it.

"So this is a vi-eng bath!" he exclaimed. "No wonder they are taboo among polite society!"

In spite of the ecstasies pouring along his nerves, Kyle raced to the port and looked out. Surrounding the ship were the blue radiances of the Hornet swarm, but they were baffled. Those that approached the ship too closely shuddered, and reeled back. And some that touched, recoiled as though maddened and streaked back toward their mountain cavern, far below.

But then, from the second ship, drifting silently in the distance, came a darting lifeboat, and as it neared, Kyle saw seated in it the familiar form of Hannigan, the Intelligence Chief.

"Here comes trouble," said Kyle to the hairy lieutenant. "And we can't shoot back. Our main controls are gone, and that includes the Hammers."

"He can knock out our generator," said the lieutenant. "It's unworkable without the outside pickup . . . "

"Get your space helmet," said Kyle. "And get one for me."

"What are you going to do?"

"Go outside and get him!"

The Lieutenant secured helmets from the locker and the two donned them. Then, proceeding to the bomb-bay locks, Kyle opened the inner lock and stepped inside, followed by the Lieutenant. They closed the lock behind them.

"Now," said Kyle, shouting loudly to carry his voice through the helmet, "we'll open the outer locks, and I'll go outside. You hold onto my hand, until I get free of the lock, then I'll try to get him with my hand ray before he gets that pickup with his life-ship."

The lieutenant looked grim. "Good luck, sir. I'll hang on tight."

Kyle operated the lock mechanism and it opened. Then he dropped through, grasping his lieutenant's hairy arm with a wrist-grip. Outside

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he saw the tiny life-craft rushing up toward him, Hannigan's face visible in the plastic cowl, twisted in a strange grimace.

Kyle aimed carefully, fired his weapon. An exultant exclamation came from his lips as the ray found its mark. Hannigan's body slumped down, and the lifecraft veered away and shot toward the planet below. But out of the ship came an angry blue radiance that arrowed up toward Kyle.

"Pull me in, quick!" yelled Kyle, but before the lieutenant could obey, the blue Hornet-radiance arrowed up past him, into the hairy arm projecting from the bomb-bay port. Kyle felt a strange tremor in the hand that clasped his, then felt himself drawn in. Looking up into the lieutenant's eyes, he saw a strange blue radiance flickering in their depths, and on the man's face a sardonic grin. Kyle whipped up his gun and fired, drilling a neat hole directly between those eyes.

But before he could reach the metal of the ship, to make contact, in a desperate attempt to open the inner port before the Hornet could make another transference, a blue flare leaped out at him, grew larger, engulfed him—and he sank down, down, into a lethargic nothingness where existence seemed a small, futile thing.

Blackness encompassed him . . .

* * *

KYLE RENISON moved in a gray haze of obedience, explaining and teaching the glittering entities the construction and operation of his deadly Hammer device. Flitting all through the cavern was a glowing swarm of the Hornets, little ones, larger ones, full-sized ones and the giant ovoid of the Honored First. Here and there stood *the men,* waiting motionless for their occupants to return; or busily writing, drawing, constructing as they taught their young occupants everything they knew.

Kyle Renison tried very hard to extract from his own inhabitant some understanding to print upon his own slack, helpless mind a complete picture of the inherited memory pattern which was the individual Hornet's structure of instinct. He succeeded in part, and the shock of fully understanding the tremendous mental resources of these immature, weeks old creatures was the dead, venomous taste of utter defeat. Man would never be free from things like this. Man as a race was doomed!

Subconsciously, in his association with the entity of the Hornet, Kyle was aware of its memories, and understood where it had come from, and why.

The Hornet had lost the Swarm, somewhere between Coma Berenice and Denebola. He had been very sick for a long time, his mind refusing to function in the absence of contact with the Swarm mind. For one who had never functioned as an individual, but only as a unit of the greater Swarm mind, being lost in space was no joke. He needed life, other life,

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as a baby needs a mother, as a man needs food.

The nearest habitable planet was one of three little worlds circling a small sun for which he had no name. He came down out of space like a whirling ball of thistle-down, glittering with the suspense of discovery, and was hurt when no one even noticed him. Apparently the tenuosity of his body was such that their eyes refused to see him!

For days he had hovered about, vastly intrigued by the simple-minded solid creatures of flesh and blood. He was both disappointed and elated to find these strange creatures absolutely without conscious race memories. Elated because their abysmal ignorance left them helpless prey to his need for hosts to supply his life-hungry body, disappointed because their minds were empty of knowledge of their own race's past. There rose in him a terrific ambition, a great pride, a constantly mounting tension arising from the vision of conquest of this new world and of growth of his own seed into a new World Swarm.

The possibility of himself fathering a new type of Swarm from these simple, two-legged units aroused within his ego-center desires such as no other of the supporting units of the *Hornito* had ever been allowed to entertain. To toy with these creatures, master of their destinies, to create from them such an organization as would astonish the others of their race for endless generations to come . . .

The Hornet had set about his new plans with all the skill of his tremendous and ancient inheritance. He had been attracted to one entity especially, a dancer named Mazarinda on the stage bills, who danced a dance called the "Firefly." Perhaps it was the dance that intrigued him. But as the dance came to a climax on one performance, the Hornet had quite suddenly sank into the dancer's body, and she had faltered, stumbled, then suddenly gone on in movements incomprehensible even to herself. She had found herself dancing with superhuman ability and imagination, and she had become the darling of Kingsend.

The Hornet, intrigued with the weird differences of this unusual host, experimented with the control of her singularly graceful limbs, and above all with the complete novelty of being a woman. For the Hornet had been a sexless creature. The functions of child-bearing and of fecundation had been pre-empted by the Swarm Queen and her chosen consorts. Now he had acquired, at one fell swoop, both sex and a will of his own. In this new power the full plan of conquest had been born in the mind of the lost Hornet.

And now Kyle Renison, Sten Rysto and the warriors of the battle fleet of Lansea worked mindlessly to further the ghastly conquest of the Hornito.

But, as they worked, the fleet of the Federation reached Lansea . . .

* * *

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KYLE RENISON'S mind was completely submerged as the gleaming ships flashed into sight above the cloud layer of the Water World, like arrows of deadly fire from nowhere into instant, terrific power. They moved in swift, complex maneuvers, in complete radio silence, trailing strange, shimmering nets of gossamer metal, weaving back and forth above the mountain beneath which the Hornet and his new *hornito* busied themselves, readying themselves for the general emergence which their plans entailed, readying for complete Empire over all Wancir under the First One, and then over Lansea and Sair.

The strange shimmering nets spread and joined magnetically above the mountain, became a vast sheet of crackling fire as cables joined the net to the atomic generators of the mighty Terran Federation warships. The electrified web of vi-eng force settled gradually down over the mountain of the Hornito, glowing and crackling with a seeming sentience and writhing animation of its own.

Riding one of these huge steel-clad arrows of fire was Sue Tenet, thrilled to the core with the snap and precision of the blue-clad figures hastening interminably about the complex corridors, thrilled with the handsome, alert young faces on every side, thrilled with the military power expressed in every glance and low-muttered command from the officer at her side. For she was on the bridge, not by permission, but by command, and her suggestions as to the nature of the weird creature that had invaded her body and mind, her explanation of the accident that had driven him out, had been the base upon which the web had been built and the nature of the force pouring through it deduced.

When they were ready, a ray similar in nature to that constructed by Renison from the vi-eng unit lanced down toward the chaotic jumble of boulders marking the shattered opening into the mountainside. Back and forth the lance of humming power played, and from within the cavern came an answering buzz of irritation, of questioning—and out from the mountainside poured an angry swarm of radiant and glittering vitality.

Inside the cavern Renison's crew stood beside those of the ships of Sten Rysto, empty of memory, empty of their inhabitants, waiting for life to begin again. Stupidly they looked about, wondering . . .

Out from the blasted side of the mountain streamed the gleaming cloud of young Hornito, up—up, a storm of humming anger, of vindictive intent, determined to stop the pain of the vi-eng ray that the lowly four-limbed race had dared to bring against them.

Up, into the dimly glowing mesh of electrified metal fibres, and the whole net leaped and tugged and jerked as they strove to pass through and reach the men in the ships beyond. Back and forth beneath them passed the diving fighting craft, each towing a cable made fast to one rim

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of the great net. Like a purse seine, the edges curled, came down in long curves, tugged together—became a great sphere completely enclosing the maddened creatures of energy from the depths of space.

Their terrific speed, their frightened strength, their immense store of inherited memory — nothing could serve them now. Down into the sphere of metal mesh lanced the huge vi-eng ray, slashing at the darting, desperate mass of blue energy. Slower, slower, weaker, became the gyrations of the great sphere, of the net. The walls of metal mesh lumped out here and there as they dashed against it in maddened attempts to escape the ray. Tighter and tighter the net closed about them, smaller grew the space in which they might dart to elude the ray. Dimmer grew the blue glitterings inside.

The fish had been taken.

Puzzled, Sue watched on the great screens of the battleship's bridge, watching one big craft take aboard a cable bigger than the little cables that had been used to draw the trap together. She clapped her hands. "Now the Hornet knows what it feels like to be a captive. If I could only hear what he is thinking!"

What puzzled her was the evacuation of the big cruiser, which was emptying men into a dozen waiting lifeboats as it gathered way slowly outward into space, the great, glowing net of steel towing behind awkwardly.

"What are they doing?" asked Sue.

The officer beside her turned, wiping his brow with a limp, wet handkerchief. "We don't know enough about that kind of being to open that net in this galaxy, Miss Tenet. That ship is under automatic control, empty of humans. That net is going to be towed until the ship runs out of fuel, straight out of all human ken, I hope. It should coast on until the end of time, barring collisions. I for one want to hear no more of any of your Hornets, young lady. If that maneuver had failed, if our timing had been off, if they had not been inside that cavern . . . It could well have meant the end of mankind. I doubt if we'd have got a second chance at them."

Sue raised on tiptoe, kissed the officer on the cheek. "But you did succeed, and I think the Terran Federation space navy is the greatest thing I've seen. I'll never forget this experience."

The officer smiled a little wearily. "I'll never forget it either, I can tell you! We were just lucky. Lucky that you and your missing Captain Renison were able to give us a clue to the only possible attack against these things. That particular beastie was unknown to Terran science, and it is still unknown. We may not be through with them, and it won't pay to forget what we've learned here."

* * *

BACK in Kingsend, Kyle Renison was rather astonished to find himself installed in the palace proper, particularly as he did not even remember the place. He was even

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more astonished when his sister swept in, her eyes glowing, to kiss him heartily.

"I don't even know you, lady . . . " he began.

"You will, dear. You're the newly appointed governor of the Terran province of Lansea. When you get your wits back, you're going to be a very angry man. But heavens knows I didn't want the job, and you couldn't help yourself, so I suggested your name. Sten was dead, along with a few of the others, when we found you. Later on, there'll be an election, and I could guess without an effort who they'll elect. You. And I'm free to do what I please again. No more government functions, no more playing great lady of the land . . . "

"I don't know what you're talking about," muttered Kyle. "And though you talk gaily, you seem sad. Is it because you have put one over on me, or is it because you knew this Sten you are talking about, who is dead?"

"You will remember, soon," she said gently.

Sue, coming in from a series of rather strenuous farewells to several departing officers of the Terran Federation fleet, slid down on the seat beside Kyle and took his hands between her own. Her voice was a mixture of impishness and glowing gratitude. "Now that you're in no condition to know what it's all about, I'd like to ask you a question, Mr. Renison."

Kyle smiled a little foggily. "If I know any answers, dear girl, I'm sure I'll give them to you."

"Will you marry me?" asked Sue.

Kyle looked at Alfreya, his brow knit with puzzlement.

Alfreya moved toward the door. "*Say yes*, you fool! You may never get a chance again. I guarantee you won't regret it!"

Kyle grinned, nodded his head. "So far as I know, I'm favorable. But what's your name?"

Sue kissed him gravely, muttering: "I can't have you going around among all these palace cats not even knowing your own name. Anything can happen. Now remember that you're my fiance. We'll wait until you've recovered your memory for the wedding, but meanwhile, you're protected. You let me know if these women even look at you."

Kyle nodded drowsily. "I'll tell them I'm your fiance, but I don't know your name. Suppose they ask?"

Sue relaxed into his arms and said: "Just point. I'll be around. And say: 'The future Mrs. Renison, over there.' "

THE END

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by Alan E. Nourse

A smoothly-run communications system held the Interstellar Union together, and when messages suddenly began coming through delayed or garbled — if they came through at all — Hanson found that he had a tough job on his hands. And one that had to be solved quickly before the Arcturians could take advantage of the Union's weakness.

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THE message came through to Section 89 Galactic Communications substation on Arcturus VII quite routinely, and was shifted with hardly a glance into normal procedure channels. First came the regular warping-in Q-signal, notifying the relay operators to stand by for a message through the Warp; then the message followed, on a low-priority channel, as simple and innocuous as any of the eighty-thousand messages from the Warp that reached Arcturus VII every month:

HQ ROCKET LANDING ARCT VII ATTENTION: PREPARE BERTHING FOR SOL III LIGHT PASSENGER CRUISER STAR KING: ARRIVING IN SECTOR V WARP 0722: CARRYING ARCT VII EMBASSY RELIEF FROM SOL III: ATTENTION DIPLOMATIC HQ FOR MEETING: REPEAT: WARPING IN SECTOR V AT 0722: STOP

The message came in through the tape relay; the operator clipped the tape into the teletype, and shuttled the routine four copies through distribution without a second thought. Notification of the arrival of a ship through the Warp was normal procedure; since the Arcturus VII Rocket Landing was the busiest in Sector II of the system, berthing for incoming ships there was necessarily tight. Advance orders were always sent to make safe berthing for an Interstellar flight. At Distribution the tape message was channeled to Rocket Landing HQ, who had the headache of clearing a berth for the ship, speeding up or cancelling any flights to conflict with its arrival, and arranging for a meeting party. Since the regular flight to Arcturus V was scheduled to leave at 0617, an hour before the Sol III ship was due, a brief call from HQ cleared the berthing place for the incoming *Star King*, and Rocket Landing HQ sat back to relax.

They didn't relax for long. Unbelievably, the *Star King* was sighted from the Warp at 0600, a long, gleaming sliver of silver in the sky, roaring in on its powerful atomics after leaving the Warp, settling down with relentless speed towards the berth that was not yet cleared by the Arcturian flight. The *Star King* was an hour early—

Control Tower screamed a warning, watched in horror as the sleek Sol III ship failed to check its course, approaching trancelike through the bright sky. Frantically an emergency blast order shot down to Berthing, and the squat, clumsy Arcturian vessel in the berth bellowed flames and rose like a startled hen to avoid the oncoming liner. But the *Star King* came in too close, decelerating desperately, gyros shaking the huge hull, swerving it from its normal landing curve into a jagged spiral to avoid the small, squat vessel, and finally screaming frantic crash-landing signals to the tower below.

But the signal was too late; from the Control Tower they watched with opened mouths and horror-filled eyes as the slim vessel from Sol III struck

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the small, compact Arcturian broadside, splitting open at the seams, exploding in long brilliant streamers of golden atom-fire, wrenching themselves and the Arcturian into a flaming mass of twisted wreckage far beyond the gravitational attraction of the planet, sliding into a distorted orbit, and drifting out, finally, a heap of burned wreckage and twisted, fused metal for the crews to trace down and salvage many days later.

In the Control Tower, men stared at each other, and back at the nightmare in the sky. Hanson, the new Chief Communications Coordinator from Sol III, tore himself from the observation port, and snatched a telephone from a gaping-mouthed operator. "Rocket Landing," he snapped. "Send back a repeat run on the Central Communications message that just came through." He ran a hand through his sandy hair, the horror of the explosion still bright in his eyes. Impatiently he stared out at the Rocket Landing honeycomb as the Arcturian operator in HQ peeled the copy from the files. "Something is way off here, Hanson," the Arcturian said in his softly muted voice. "The message specifically states that that ship would arrive at 0722. It warped in over an hour early."

Hanson swore. Carefully he checked his own tape file. The message was there, in duplicate, just as it had warped in. He grabbed the telephone again, and dialed Galactic Communications station, his hand trembling. "Got the original tape on that *Star King* message?" he snapped.

"Yes, sir. Just as it came in. Shall we hold it?"

"For dear life. I'll be down in a moment." Slamming down the receiver, he elbowed his way to the door, ran up the narrow stairwell to the roof of Control Tower, and slipped into the small cockpit of a shuttle car. He set the dials, and instantly was zooming across the barren Arcturus VII landscape toward the city, his mind racing angrily. The ship hadn't made a mistake—there was no chance for mistake in Interstellar travel with the Benson warp. As the shuttle skimmed along, Hanson scowled out the port without seeing, his stomach knotted in apprehension. Something had gone wrong, somewhere, frightfully wrong. An hour's error in Interstellar flight arrival was impossible, unheard of—a message from Central Communications, light years away, could have warped through in a matter of minutes if there had been trouble, and Berthing could have been prepared for emergency handling. There had been no such warning—just the routine notification. But an hour's error simply could not occur, not with the Benson warp. A ship left a destination with no possible way of losing time until it warped in to whichever star system was its destination—the Warp was that certain.

And messages were even more certain—

But the Central Communications message had said 0722, and the ship had arrived over an hour early, ex-

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pecting a berth, and finding none. Hanson took a quavering breath, and shut his already tired eyes. An hour's error, and two ships blown to twisted wreckage before his eyes. And *he'd* have to explain it to the Arcturian Council. His stomach knotted, and he felt suddenly ill. It *couldn't* happen—but it had. And of all places, on Arcturus VII—

Galactic Communications stood up in the city like a flat oval tower. The shuttle car gently slid into the entrance port, hissing in deceleration, and Hanson clambered down to the platform, his face grave. He was a young man, but he knew his Rocket Landing, and he knew his Communications. That ship hadn't been wrong. The error had been in the message. Somehow, a false message had slipped through.

He crossed swiftly through the buzzing confusion of the Communications room, and down into the sound-proofed office. At the door he met his undersupervisor, an Arcturian, staring at him with cold yellow-eyed anger.

"What about that message?" Hanson snapped, before the Arcturian could speak.

"Nothing here to indicate," the Arcturian said, an indignant whine in his soft, musical voice. "There was no error on the Arcturian end. Rocket Landing got the exact message that warped in from Sol III." He wrinkled his greenish face in the Arcturian equivalent of puzzled anger. "The message was wrong when it came through."

Hanson took the tape, checked it carefully. There was no doubt. The message had read "warping in at 0722." Hanson checked the coding, and began to rewind the spool with a tired sigh. It was 0759 when the second message came through.

The Arcturian took it, and crossed the room to Hanson, spitting Arcturian expletives at the amazingly rapid rate his race used when excited, his bland, unhuman face tight, round eyes flat with anger. "Read!" he hissed, passing the tape to Hanson.

Hanson read, his eyes suddenly narrowing as the blood rushed to his face. "My god, they've gone crazy!" he choked. "A four-priority on something like this—"

The message was short and succinct:

CORRECT WARPING TIME FOR SOL III STAR KING TO READ 0600 NOT 0722: STOP

It was short, and succinct. And two hours late.

Hanson whirled to the teletype desk, eyes blazing. "Send word through to the operators," he snapped at his assistant. "Tell them to prepare to shut down Channel 473. Then take care of the report and put through an emergency check to Galactic Central." His eyes narrowed as he turned back to the teletype. "And I'll post for an immediate investigation to the Grand Interstellar Council. With a One-priority on that message, there wouldn't have been an accident. But somebody gave it a Four—"

Carefully he began punching the

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teletype keys as the Arcturian went out, punching the tape to close down the channel through which the message had come. With a Centralized and efficient Central Communications, there should be no source of error, no interference, no sabotage, no mechanical failure. He scowled heavily and tapped out the message in cold anger, a chill of fear and apprehension in his spine:

QBB—REPEAT QBB—REPEAT QBB—WE ARE SHUTTING DOWN CHANNEL 473: REQUEST IMMEDIATE CHECK THROUGH CENTRAL AT LUNA CITY: QBB—REPEAT QBB—WE ARE SHUTTING DOWN—

"BUT I tell you, I'm an engineer, not a detective!" Jeremy Hanson stared down at the small wiry man behind the desk, his eyes wide with surprise.

Fritz Hebel smiled back, rubbing his chin with narrow, delicate fingers. Everything about the Chief of Interstellar Communications breathed of sureness and precision, Hanson thought—the small compact figure, the quiet coolness in his grey eyes, the careful, calm dignity and precision of his movements. Hebel smiled at him, and said quietly, "That's quite true—you're an engineer—but you're also angry. I think we need an angry man for this job."

Hanson felt his face flush hotly, and his eyes flash. "There was no excuse for that *Star King* accident," he snapped. "It was either negligence, or incompetence, or sabotage, and there is no room for those things in Communications."

Hebel nodded, his cool grey eyes bright. "Exactly! There's no room for it—but it's there. Negligence, incompetence, sabotage—I don't know which." He rubbed his hands nervously. "But I do know one thing. Something is going wrong in Communications. That's why I called you back here to Terra."

Hanson looked at him sharply. "But why me? You've got a Security organization to check trouble—"

Hebel looked at him guardedly. "You know Communications as well as anybody in the Galaxy. And you've got a lot to gain by finding the trouble. The Arcturians are angry, Hanson—they want action." He smiled a little, and looked Hanson straight in the eye. "Anyway, you've done investigation work before. Like that little job three years ago on Centaurus III—"

Hanson's face darkened. "I didn't think that was even mentioned in my record."

"You did the work, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Hanson, hotly. "I did the work, all right. Only the blonde harpie I was working with stole all the credit, and nearly had me on the rack for treason in the bargain." Hanson stared at the bright oval of sunlight from Sol coming in the window of the spacious office. "I'd never want a job like that again, not for anything."

Hebel was silent for a long moment. He walked to the oval window,

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staring out across the city of New Denver to the far distant rim where the Rockies almost touched the sky. "Hanson," he said softly. "Something's gone wrong with Central Communications. The Interstellar Union is in trouble. Terrible trouble, Hanson—"

Hanson looked up, feeling a chill run up his spine. "What do you mean? Just a couple of ships blown up."

Hebel shook his head. For a moment he was silent, rubbing his hands together thoughtfully. Then he said, "Back in the old days, there wasn't any trouble with Communications. In 2180 or 90, Sol was just getting its own planets explored and colonized. Sol III led the way—she had the technology, and all the communications equipment on hand from the great wars a century or so before. In the early days the traffic was simple, and normal equipment could carry the load, until Benson discovered the Warp principle that sent men to the stars. Arcturus and Vega and the Centauri—practically any place in the Galaxy, and beyond, too, when they were ready to go. So men went to the stars, and found other planets, other intelligent life. And commerce began to grow, commerce on an unheard-of scale. The great organism of the Interstellar Union began to develop, slowly at first, then faster and faster. And like any other embryo, the first part of the organism to develop was the central nervous system."

"Communications," said Hanson.

Hebel nodded. "*Centralized* communications. The system was very sloppy at first—a loose, disorganized network of radio-teletype Communications, slow, unreliable. They hadn't thought of using the Benson Warp for short-wave transmission. There was no central clearing house, no sort of efficiency. The Interstellar Union finally was set up under the Galactic Grand Council when the combined military groups had smashed the Arcturian invasion of Vega thirty years ago and forced Arcturus into the Union. From then on development of the Union demanded an efficient, centralized Communications system."

Hebel pulled thoughtfully at his cigar. "Luna City was built," he said after a pause. "Sol III had the equipment. It was the logical choice for a Central Communications. From one end of the Galaxy to the other Central handles messages: receives them, codes them, relays them, routes them, assigns them, sees that they get where they are going at the greatest possible speed. Just as commerce and economics became the Union's life blood, Central Communications became the life-force, the brain, the central nervous system. The Union has grown in strength, constantly expanding, and every planet of every star has enjoyed its benefits. There is no area in all Interstellar civilization that does not depend on Central Communications for its life force. We and the whole Galaxy depend on it the way you depend on the working of your own brain."

The room was dead still. Hanson

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looked at the Security Chief, a small knot growing in his stomach. "What are you getting at?"

"When your brain stops working, you die," snapped Hebel, his voice sharp in the stillness. "When Central Communications stops working, our civilization dies. When Central Communications breaks down, the Interstellar Union is finished, a shambles, a wreck."

His voice cut off, sharply, and he sucked in a nervous breath. "It's happening, Hanson," he said softly. "Somewhere, somehow, slowly and insidiously, *Central Communications is breaking down!*"

Jeremy Hanson lighted a cigarette with shaking fingers, the knot in his stomach tight. "Then the *Star King* wasn't the first trouble," he said dully.

"Not by a long shot. It's been growing now for the past two years. If it's sabotage, it's a very clever job—so very subtle that it seems impossible. The messages aren't coming through right. They come through incomplete; or garbled, they come through on the wrong priority scale, they are returned to the sender with out-of-order signals, or QBB's, and then, when they're returned for alternate routing, they disappear entirely. Mistakes, fatal mistakes keep happening, time after time. Vega III, for instance, had a serious polio epidemic last year. You know how fragile and vulnerable the Vegans are. It was like a plague, killing them off like flies. They used up their supply of antitoxin in the first three days, and sent out a call for more from the suppliers. The message went through Central, and the serum was missent three times before it finally got to Vega III. Half the population was dead by then. Long shipping orders are sent through, tying up a channel for days, while high-priority crash warnings are held up three and four days in transit, and nobody can tell why."

Hebel sighed tiredly. "And now the worst thorn in our sides is getting troublesome. Your friends the Arcturians seem to be rebelling wholesale against the Union in general, and Communications in particular. They don't care a hang about the *Star King;* one ship from Sol III is a matter of extreme indifference to them. But they lost their own ship in that crash, and they see it as an opportunity to revolt against the whole system. The system is crumbling, and somewhere, there is an answer. Something is happening in Grand Central Communications in Luna City that nobody, not even the supervisor there, can spot, and it's tearing the Interstellar Union apart at the seams." Hebel looked closely at Hanson. "You wanted an investigation. I'm asking you to make it, a thoroughgoing, inside-out investigation, by a man who knows communications inside out. I think you're the man."

Hanson stared at the shiny desk top. Finally he said, "What about Forhan? He's the top man at Luna City. What does he think is wrong?"

Hebel shook his head, grey eyes

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troubled. "John Forhan is the best man in Communications. But breakdown or no breakdown, there are still eight hundred thousand messages going through Central Communications every day, and Forhan has to keep them going. He can't help us, and he's told us so point blank. The pressure of the place has him nearly crazy as it is, and there's no one qualified to replace him for more than a short time. He'll cooperate with you, but he won't be able to give you any time. The investigation will be up to you."

Hanson took a deep breath. "I don't like it," he said, tiredly. "I couldn't take another deal like Centauri III. I just couldn't take it—"

Hebel watched him, grey eyes cool and careful. "We need you badly, Hanson. More than you think. And you'll have—" he hesitated imperceptibly—"full authority on the job. It'll be up to your judgment. Now what do you say?"

Hanson grinned sourly. "I'll probably wish I hadn't," he said, "but I'll take the job."

GALACTIC Central Communications lay in the exact center of Luna City, a gigantic, efficient, pulsating, smoothly-running madhouse. The building stood separate from the crowding modernity of the city, the smooth curve of its white walls rising a thousand feet above the skyline, sweeping up and up to the rounded dome at the top. Though truly an architectural dream, Galactic Central Communications was primarily a functional building, housing the heart of Communications of a dozen star systems, the hub of all communion in the vast Intersellar Union. Spreading out from the sweeping curves of Central, Luna City fanned for miles under the heavy plastic pressure dome, a city of curves and terraced gardens, curiously incongruous among the cascading jagged peaks of the crater around it, an artificial city on a barren world, the mechanical center of a billion buzzing messages.

Jeremy Hanson rose early the day after his arrival at Luna City, stretched, and viewed uneasily the curving sweep of the bedroom wall, the oval port in the center looking out onto the Fifth level boulevards. Something was missing from the picture somewhere—in spite of Hebel's sincerity, and the historical pep-talk. Galactic Grand Council did not delegate almost dictatorial authority to obscure communications officers. He scowled as he buzzed for breakfast, and stepped into a shower-shave unit, relaxing in the tepid water, as his face was cleared ultrasonically of the scratchy two-day stubble. He could probably thank the Arcturians, with their typical single-minded selfishness, for the job. They were venomously bitter that one of their own precious craft should have fallen victim to the bungling of Galactic Central Communications. Hanson sighed, slipped into his clothes, and stepped into the bedroom, where his breakfast was waiting. Whatever was missing, he thought, he'd learn soon

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enough.

He learned all too soon. She was sitting on his bed, nonchalantly drinking his breakfast coffee, blonde hair curled about her ears, and he felt the knot tighten almost to sickness in his stomach. He saw it clearly now, the whole investigation picture, crystal clear—too painfully clear. "Marly!"

She sat languidly on the bed, sipping the coffee, and she glanced up at him almost as languidly through long eyelashes, half laughing at him with her cool grey eyes, studying his carefully blank face for a moment, then smiling warmly. "Don't say it," she said, moving to her feet. "Just think it. You didn't really think that you'd have a free hand in this, did you?"

Hanson didn't return the smile. "Put down my coffee," he snapped, his eyes heavy with anger, "and get out of here. If you or Hebel think I'll work with *you* again, you're crazy. I had enough last time."

She walked over to him, her small lithe body swaying in a far from official manner, blonde hair done back in the loose easy way he used to love. "I see you've shaved, Jerry," she smiled, ignoring his remark. "This must be a very special occasion." In her warm, smiling face only her eyes were not smiling, the cold, calculating grey eyes. She reached up and kissed him easily on the cheek. "Communications service has done wonders for you, Jerry."

The same old Marly Norgaard, Hanson thought to himself bitterly. The same small piquant face, the same full lips, the same compelling feline grace when she moved, the same unspoken but ever-present knowledge that whatever she wanted, her very femininity would get it for her—and most aggravating, the same small corners of smile that told Hanson that she knew she still made blonde music run through his head. He scowled at her blackly, feeling his ears go red. "Damn you," he said coldly. "*You* got me assigned to this job."

Her face fell, almost sincerely. "Jerry," she said. "You know we can work together, and do a good job." She watched him in growing alarm as he stalked across to the visiphone, began to dial for a Sol III channel. "—and if you're thinking of ringing Hebel and calling it off, you're wasting your time," she added coldly. "You won't get anywhere trying."

He whirled on her as if he had been stung. "Look," he said in a choked voice, "I've got a job to do. I don't need you, and I don't want you, either to help, or to cut in on the glory."

Her smile faded, leaving her face curiously lifeless. "Jerry. I got you this job because I wanted to make up a little for that last time. This Communications business is deeper than just machines, Jerry. You'll need a psychologist, and a diplomat to help you. I've had plenty experience as both." There was a fire in her grey eyes. "It's *big*, Jerry. Let's patch it up between us, and get to work."

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Hanson looked at her, bitter memories racing through his mind, memories of double-dealing, of promises ignored, and subtle but ever-so-effective back-stabbings. Memories of Marly Norgaard's cold, ambitious climb up and up in the political network of the Interstellar Union, of her absolute ruthlessness to gain her own ends. She hardly looked the part, this sweet-faced, sensuous girl he had once loved. For a moment the pleading in her eyes, the deadly sincerity in her voice caused him to waver. The overpowering awareness of her as a woman swept through his mind like a breath of jasmine—and then his eyes narrowed.

"What's in it for you, Marly?"

He saw it then, in her eyes. A brief flicker as the veil inadvertently dropped, and was drawn back tightly. Her eyes flared wide for a moment, and her nostrils tightened before she gained control. Then her jaw relaxed into a warm, almost naive smile. "For once, Jerry, I'm not in it for anything. I was assigned to the investigation, and I knew I could work with you, to spot the trouble before the Union explodes in our faces. I know that nothing can beat us, if we quit fighting each other." She watched him, eyes pleading. "Trust me, Jerry. I'll play square."

He looked at her for a long moment, his face like stone. Then he exhaled the faintest whisper of a sigh. "All right, Marly," he said. "I'll work with you." He saw the brief flicker of cold triumph in her eyes, quickly veiled, and his stomach tightened. "But one thing you'd better understand first—"

"Anything, Jerry," she said.

"I'll work with you," he said softly. "But I'll never trust you."

THEY caught the shuttle car on the Fifth level, and settled back in the airfoam seats as the little monorail swished rapidly down the spiral to the lower level transport lane and buzzed on through the outlying city toward Galactic Central Communications. "Forhan is expecting us," Hanson remarked. "I gave him a call before we left."

She nodded thoughtfully. "I hope we don't have trouble with him. I've heard that John Forhan is no pansy to deal with."

Hanson looked at her sharply. "What's your plan of approach on this?" he asked suddenly.

"We might as well be methodical. The messages are coming into Central right, and going out wrong. As Hebel put it, the brain isn't functioning right." She paused, bringing a small notebook from her pocket. "Central Communications is divided into Operations, Maintenance, and Personnel. The Operations and Maintenance are your job. You can check them thoroughly. I'll work in Personnel. I'm particularly interested in Psych division up here."

A few moments later they were ushered into the large vaulted office in the Central Communications building. The messenger who had met them on the platform said, "Mr. Forhan is Inside now, but he'll be with

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you soon:"

They took seats and waited. Filling one wall was a mammoth space-chart of the Communications network of the entire Galaxy, a myriad of intricately connected lines covering every section of the chart. A special series of tape-relay banks lay against another wall, and a small radio-teletype stood at the massive desk. Hanson looked about the room wonderingly. "This whole setup was Forhan's work, wasn't it?"

Marly nodded. "He was the organizer. Before he started beating the drum for a central clearing house and consolidation of communications, the system was a mess. Forhan fought tooth and nail to tear the old, antiquated relay stations down, to break up the dozens of little, independent networks that criss-crossed the Galaxy. They were clumsy and inefficient, and they blocked the growth of Interstellar Union. Forhan finally won out against the small concerns, and the Arcturians, who were opposed to the Union from the first. And Forhan has handled Central ever since."

A sudden roar burst into the room as a heavy door opened to admit a man in an outlandish face-mask. The door slammed shut after him, swallowing the noise as abruptly as it had appeared. The man was a giant, his body almost cramped in the ample office as he dropped the mask from his face, and looked up at his visitors angrily. "I'm Forhan," he growled in a rich bass. "You're the people from Security, I suppose."

His uncordial voice was cut off by the jangling telephone. Forhan took the receiver, pushing the heavy shock of iron-grey hair out of his eyes as he talked rapidly. "I'll be back Inside in five minutes," he said to the telephone, finally. "Hold it until I get there." He turned his attention back to Hanson. "Now, what can I do for you?"

Hanson looked at Marly. "We'll need your cooperation, Mr. Forhan, in checking over the working of Central. We're trying to spot the source of the errors that have been coming out of here—" He knew he had made a mistake before the words were out of his mouth.

"Damn Hebel!" Forhan grated, his face stormy. "I don't have enough trouble keeping this place going, I have to play games with Security too." He glowered and sank wearily into his chair at the desk, tired lines about his eyes. "Sure," he said sarcastically. "Go ahead and investigate. Do anything you like, I won't stop you. But I'll tell you right now that you're wasting your time."

Marly looked at him sharply. "How do you mean, wasting our time?"

He made an angry noise in his throat. "You're looking for something that isn't here," he said sourly. "If there's a breakdown in Interstellar Communications, it isn't here in Central." He started to struggle back into the headgear.

"There's *got* to be a breakdown in Central," Marly snapped. "Pride is one thing, Mr. Forhan, but let's face facts—"

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The huge man whirled on her savagely. "All right," he snarled. "You say there's a breakdown, *you find it*. I can't find it—" He snatched up the telephone angrily, shifting his attention from them as completely as if he had left the room.

"Marly!" Hanson hissed in an undertone. "Don't be stupid! You won't get anywhere by getting him sore."

Her face was angry red. "The nerve of him! Trying to palm that stuff off on me, this business that everything is going along fine. He's been feeding that to Hebel for the past two years. I'll fix his—"

"You won't fix anything," Hanson cut her off. "Shut up and let me handle this." His eyes were sharp, staring straight at her angry grey ones. For a long moment she stared defiantly, then shrugged her shoulders indifferently. "Do it your way," she said.

Forhan was replacing the receiver when Hanson stood up. "Look, Mr. Forhan. We don't want to hinder your work in any way. We know you're rushed—why don't you take me Inside with you now, and let Miss Norgaard run down to Psych division?"

Forhan straightened his mammoth shoulders, and threw Jerry a grateful look. "Good idea," he said, more softly. "You're name's Hanson? Glad to know you. I'm ready to go Inside now."

Hanson winked at Marly and stripped off his jacket. "I'll see you later," he drawled over his shoulder, "after I get through talking to Mr. Forhan. Get what you can at Psych. And keep cool, girlie, keep cool."

He grinned at the venomous look he received, and turned to Forhan. "Let's go," he said.

John Forhan punched the button to open the heavy door to the Inside.

THE racket was deafening. As Forhan opened the soundproofed door the noise swelled out in an almost overpowering wave, a nerve-shattering combination of clatter, click, buzz, and vibration. Hanson's face went white for a moment under the impact of the powerful wave; then he clapped his hands involuntarily over his ears, dulling the noise only slightly. He shook his head, and tried to yell at Forhan, but the throbbing racket swept his voice away unheard. Forhan motioned him over to a rack near the door. Slipping down a small instrument panel, he drew out one of the curious masklike arrangements he was wearing, and slipped it over Hanson's head, clamping the ear-pieces deep into his ears, and adjusting the nose-piece carefully. The heavy well of sound sank down to a gentle persistent hum, and Hanson felt his taut nerves relax. "That was awful!" he breathed. "Why can't they soundproof this place?"

Forhan's voice grated through his earpieces. "Can't be done. Just too much noise." He grinned sourly. "But the mask is mostly for supersonics. A couple of days in here without a mask, and you'd never hear or smell again. Tears nervous

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tissue all to pieces."

Together they turned to look down the long Central Communications room. It extended unbroken for nearly a mile, block upon city block of gleaming panels and clattering teletypes, as far as he could see. The machines were arranged in huge banks along the walls, row upon row of sheaves running down the middle of the room, a weltering hive of frantic activity.

"This is it," said Forhan. "A message coming in from any point comes up from the 'stacks' down below into these relays. Here it's coded and routed, and sent back to the transmitter banks, and whiz! There it is."

Hanson watched the insane activity, wide-eyed. He was acquainted with the smaller sub-stations, the easy, quiet work there. Here the activity, the noise, the insistent, aggravating, nearly-audible supersonic vibration gave the place an air of impossible complexity and confusion. Somewhere in this room, he thought, *somewhere,* an insidious breakdown is underway, growing, accumulating, eating out the heart and brain of interstellar civilization. Something, somewhere—

Forhan motioned to him, and they walked slowly down the crosswalk between the panels. Several hundred feet down, on the outgoing side, a series of panels were quiet, lights out, the casings and soundproofing lying out on the crosswalk, while three men worked busily inside. Hanson strolled over, watched the men as they worked, removing tubes, tearing out wiring. He looked at Forhan. "What's this?"

Forhan shrugged. "A new channel going in," he said, indifferently. "They're always doing this."

Hanson raised his eyebrows. "Where is it going to?"

"Vega V. Word just came through a month ago that they needed four new channels. So we have to rewire all the panels that cover the Vega system."

Hanson gaped. "But you must have the whole Vega channel closed down!"

"We have. The panels here can handle just so much volume. When they get overloaded, and a new channel has to go in, we have to close down the whole channel for rewiring. You know what a mess *that* is, and then they have to rewire all the calculator relays down in the 'stacks.' That's where the messages are received and stored, waiting their turn on the machines up here." He grinned. "Brother, if *this* is a mess, that's a regular madhouse!"

"But what does Vega do for Communications while all this is going on?"

Forhan shrugged again. "Priority material goes through other channels and substations. It gets to be complicated, especially with a dozen repair jobs going on at the same time. But at the rate Communications is growing, it can't be helped. New planets coming in all the time, old planets overloading, and needing new circuits and channels." He looked at Hanson belligerently. "It's a credit

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to Central that we handle it so smoothly. It's always under control, and it always will be, as long as I'm around here."

Hanson shrugged uneasily. His nerves were beginning to fray in the aggravating vibration, and he felt slightly sick to his stomach. "How do you ever work in here?" he growled, as they moved on down the crosswalk. "I should think you'd go crazy."

Forhan smiled. "Conditioning," he said. "Without it the men would crack in no time. That's the supersonics, again. It works into you, and through you. Give it time enough, and it'll tear your stomach to pieces. But the men get long rests after short duty periods, so they have a chance to repair themselves."

A shuttle car suddenly skimmed across the vaulted ceiling and settled down near them. A man jumped out, ran down toward them. "John!" he shouted. "We're going to have trouble down in 283 sector if you don't get Steinthal off that codex. He's trying to do a double shift—"

Forhan turned to him, eyes wide. "He knows that's strictly forbidden!" he snapped.

The man colored. "I know that. He wanted to keep it quiet, but I thought you should know. McClenehan started getting the shakes a little while ago, and Steinthal took his shift and sent him down to Psych. But Steinthal isn't doing so hot himself. He just finished eight hours, and he's starting another."

Forhan cursed, and ran for the shuttle car, Hanson on his heels. The car scooted up to the ceiling as Forhan jammed a Sector button, gripping the rail of the car tightly as it sped down the long line of banks. Twenty seconds later they swung down toward the crosswalk again Forhan still cursing. They were climbing out of the car when they heard the scream.

It was hardly human, rising in their earphones from a thin whine into a piercing, full-bodied ululation of agony. Down the areaway they saw the man reel away from his teletype, ripping his headgear frantically off his head, face contorted in desperate agony, screams piercing the madhouse roar of the place over and over again. Covering his eyes with his hands, the man ran blindly into the heavy relay panel, striking at it madly with his fists, ripping skin and flesh from his fingers as he scraped at the unyielding metal casing. Like a tiger Forhan tore down the areaway, jerking the man away from the panel, clipping him with one short savage blow behind the ear. The man crumpled like a marionette to the floor.

When Hanson reached them, John Forhan was dialing a small intercom telephone, speaking rapidly, his face white with anger. "Get a Psych squad down here, stat! Man is Fred Steinthal, 283 Sector banks. Looks like a complete break, he nearly ripped his hands off on the machine—yes, overdose, of course. Now don't just stand there, get a squad down here, and send a relief for the machines."

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He snapped down the switch, and returned to Hanson, his hands trembling. "Sorry to leave you like this, but I'll have to take over until a relief arrives." He sat down at the teletype, shaking his head bitterly. "Sometimes," he said, "I think *I'll* go crazy—"

THE psycho-physician came out of the cubicle, closing the door quietly, and ran his hand through his hair as he crossed the waiting room to his office where Hanson and Marly Norgaard were waiting. They stood up when he came in, and looked at each other when they saw his sour face.

"No good?" ventured the girl.

"No good. The man went into complete breakdown. He was bound to—the conditioning is good only to a certain limit. Beyond that anything can happen. He should have known better than to try to stay beyond the limit."

"How about treatment?" Marly asked sharply. "Isn't there some way you can get him rational for a few moments? I've simply got to talk to him."

The doctor shrugged unhappily. "We can't handle his rehabilitation here. We have no choice but to send him back to Sol III for recovery." He scowled at Marly. "You don't seem to realize what has happened here. The man isn't good for anything. He's completely shut down. We can't do anything with him here."

"But it happened so suddenly!" Hanson shook his head in disbelief. "One of the other men was talking to him just before it happened, and he was perfectly all right—"

"Not quite. He may have looked all right, but he wasn't, by a long way. He's been cheating for a long time, working beyond the limit many times, or he wouldn't have broken." The doctor sank tiredly down at his desk. "You know about the psycho-conditioning that we give Central Communication operators. Without it, the men could only work four hours out of a week, and they'd have to have a month in the country for every four weeks on the job. Any more work without conditioning would send them off the deep end in no time. But we couldn't get enough operatives to run a work schedule like that, so we worked out the conditioning program."

The doctor lit a cigarette nervously, blew small rings of blue smoke into the room. "The conditioning just increases the man's resistance to the strain of the work. First we filter the men to get those who are extremely stable—then we start jacking up their resistances. It was a tough job figuring out the program, but we succeeded. We turned out men who could work for eight hours at a stretch, relieved by sixteen hours rest. Then, after six weeks of such work, they would need a month in the country to recuperate from the effect of the work, the fatigue, the pressure of activity, and the accumulated damage to their bodies."

"Of course," Marly frowned. "So this man broke down only because

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he was overloading himself beyond the limits of the conditioning? Working too long, without a break?"

"Far too long. And for a long period of time. And the next one that does it will do the same thing."

Marly and Hanson started down the hall toward the elevator from the Psych department. "Did you get what you wanted?" Hanson asked.

"Not by a long shot." The girl's eyes were angry. "There's something missing here, Jerry. I think I'm on the trail right to the heart of the trouble. I've got to give these men on the job some tests, but I think I may have the answer right in my lap." She grinned at him happily. "What do you think of that, smart boy?"

He grinned back at her. "I think that's fine. You should get a medal, but you won't." He paused at the elevators, still grinning. "See you later, Marly. I've got some testing to do, too. But you and I differ on one point."

"What do you mean?"

"I *know* where the trouble is."

HE found the answer, of course, down in the "stacks." From the moment he had heard of the QBB on the Vega system channel, he knew that he'd find it, and he did, down below in the great clattering mass of wires and vacuum tubes that they called the "stacks." Here was the real brain, the real central nervous system of Interstellar Communications. This was where the disease could be found, where the messages were stored, and relayed on for transmission on the unthinkable multitude of channels leaving Central. And when he found the answer, it was so deceptively simple, so perfectly obvious, that he knew without question that there was no sane reason why it had not been discovered from the first.

He had started off with a couple of simple messages, after he had connected a transmitter and receiver into the lifeless "stacks" controlling the Vega system. They were routine messages, that would be handled by the permanent circuits, run out under routine procedure: a standard message for routine landing orders, a simple two-symbol code for a birthday greeting. And then he sent a message in through the temporary circuits, a short straight-wire message with a high priority symbol—

—And got back a rush medical requisition that was *four years old!*

He stared at it, unbelieving, and his cigarette butt burned his fingers unnoticed. This wasn't his message, it was somebody else's message, asking for emergency medications on Sol VI. It had been sent four years ago, and it was still here—

Swiftly, Hanson moved to the storage file, punching a recorder button. He froze as the "stacks" began to click, rattling, belching out message after message after endless message—, old messages, outdated messages, incomplete messages, garbled messages —thousands of messages, waiting, outdated, *unsent*—

And the question screamed insis-

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tently through Hanson's mind: How could they be here? Why hadn't they been sent? *Why hadn't someone found out about this?*

In a flash he saw the picture, a picture that pointed to insanity. A picture of rapidly growing, vastly expanding civilization. An already overloaded Central Communications, taking a greater overload as it fought desperately against time to build in more channels, to relieve the overload, and then to build in again more channels to relieve the already overloaded new channels. And the messages were piling up, overloading the storage banks, and the banks were backlogging, forgetting the old, unsent messages in order to store the new unsent messages—

Hanson's hands shook violently as he lit a cigarette. Forhan should have known, he should have seen the trouble years ago, he should have corrected the trouble, done something, *anything*. Why hadn't he? Hanson's mind reeled, groping desperately for the answer, fighting to see why *no one knew* the backlogging had been going on. This was part of the answer, true, but what good was an answer that didn't make sense? The obvious thrust itself at him a dozen times before he finally looked at it, tested it with his mind, recognized it as the obvious.

He was looking for a rational answer. Some reason that would make sense. But he wouldn't find one. *There was no rational answer!*

If there were a rational answer, the trouble would have been spotted long ago, and corrected. And the trouble hadn't been spotted. Whatever the answer was, it wasn't rational. *It had to be insane.*

Frantically he tore the phone from the desk. He had to see Forhan, question him, bring him down here, *show* him. Forhan *must* have known about the backlog in the "stacks"—why hadn't he acted on the trouble? Hanson rattled the dial again, snapped the code for Forhan's office.

And Marly answered the phone in Forhan's office, sharply, nervously. "Where have you been, Jerry? We've been trying to get you all afternoon. You'd better get up to Forhan's office immediately."

"But I've got to talk to him," Hanson snapped. "He's got to come down here, it's a matter of life or death. This business could blow sky high any minute—"

"It surely could!" The girl's voice was tight and sharp. "You'd better come up, Jerry, and make it fast. Forhan can't come down. Forhan's dead."

THERE were just four of them, standing in Forhan's office, dressed in the smooth neat suits of Terran business men. But the smooth, silky-greenish skin of the Arcturian, the flat, almost noseless faces, the small yellow eyes had nothing Terran about them. Hanson closed the door quietly behind him, and faced into the room before his eye caught the small snub-nosed automatic one of them held in his hand.

The girl was sitting lightly in the

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corner of the desk, her leg swinging loosely to and fro. She looked up at him, cooly, her eyes not quite meeting his. Then she pointed to the corner of the office, behind the desk, where John Forhan's huge body lay twisted, still bleeding. "There's your friend," she said smoothly.

He looked again at the four Arcturians, his face white. "All right, Marly. Let's have it."

"Take a look out the port. You'll find your answer there."

He walked stiffly across the room to the oval window. His stomach tightened. There was no mistaking the armada that hovered high over the city; the squat, misshapen vessels were unmistakably Arcturian, several dozen of them, bristling with heavy armament.

"We have grown tired of waiting for Central Communications to correct its errors," one of the Arcturians hissed in his high, sing-song voice. "Communications does *not* control the Benson Warp. We can send ships where we please, when we please. And those ships are not playing games, Mr. Hanson."

Hanson's face was ashen. "You wouldn't dare—"

The Arcturian shrugged eloquently. "You may recall that the Arcturian system has never been too pleased with the manner in which Interstellar Union has been run. Nor the way Communications has been run. In fact, we are much displeased. Almost to the point of violence, one might say." His wheezy voice had a venomous edge to it.

"But Interstellar Security could wipe you out—"

"Interstellar Security has been and gone. They wouldn't dare touch us, and they know it. Our ships could destroy this Center, Hanson—they could blow it into a crater. Then you'd have a *real* Communications breakdown. What is your signal for closing down a channel? QBB?" The Arcturian managed an acid smile. "Complete QBB, on all channels. Interstellar Union would then be finished, and anyone who wanted to step into control would have no difficulty."

"Like the Arcturians?"

The spokesman smiled. "Like the Arcturians," he said bluntly.

"But you'd have no communications, either."

"That would be fine. Until we had a chance to set up under our own control, and under our own terms. But of course, it would be easier if Central continued to function. With Miss Norgaard's help, and we hope yours, we can avoid most unpleasantness."

Hanson turned to Marly, his eyes cold. "Get them out of here," he snarled. "I want to talk to you alone."

She jerked her head to the door. "It's all right," she said. "He won't try anything." The four left the room silently, and she turned back to see Hanson's blazing eyes.

He had her arm pinned behind her in an instant, and forced her back against the port, his blood boiling. "You little fool," he grated. "You don't know what you're doing. You could be shot for this."

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She wriggled loose, and whirled on him, eyes flashing. "You're the fool," she snapped. "You can't tell a golden opportunity when you see one. What do you think I'm trying to do?" Then she tossed her hair back, breathing heavily. "Jerry, can't you see the opportunity? These Arcturians have had this planned for over three years. They had been waiting for twenty years—just waiting for something to happen, somewhere in the Union, to give them an edge. They never have wanted anything to do with the Union—they were forced in because they were a necessary link in an otherwise perfect chain. But they simply are not cooperative people. If they're in things, they have to run things. And as soon as Communications began to see trouble, they saw the chance to step in."

Hanson sank down into the chair. "Go on," he said. "Where do you fit in?"

She looked at him coldly. "I've been working for them for over two years. Oh, don't give me the big eyes. I want money, and I want power. The Interstellar Union was all set up before I got going. Too tight politically and economically to let anyone from the bottom in. But with a breakdown, a change of command—I could see where the Arcturians were going. I've been in Interstellar Security long enough to have plenty of information for them. I've kept close check on Communications, because that is the weakest point in the whole system. Without communications, the Union is through—completely washed up. If the Arcs can control Communications, they control the Union, and any human who can help them do it can be on top when they're running things."

"So with Central in their pockets they can walk in on the Grand Galactic Council, and take over everything in the confusion." He shook his head, as though to clear his mind. "And Marly Norgaard is on top. That's very pretty. But suppose something forces their hand? Suppose they *have* to bomb out Luna City? If they blow up Central then *their* communications are gone too. What do they do then?"

She walked over to him quickly, hands trembling. "That's just it!" she whispered excitedly. "They *can't* destroy Luna City. It's a bluff, nothing but a big bluff. Without Central they'd be as helpless as anyone else." She watched his face narrowly. "For them it's all or nothing. If they're in the Union, they want to run it, and run it their way. They're gambling everything on taking control of Central Communications. If they can't get it, they're through." Her eyes crinkled slyly. "That's my ace in the hole, Jerry. I can bargain with them, because *I've found the key to the problem*. They give me what I want, and I can get Central running again, without a flaw, and they are on top. And that's why I need you."

Hanson watched her in growing confusion. A mental picture of the critically overloaded stacks ran through his mind, the puzzle without the answer. She couldn't know

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about that. "Wait a minute," he said softly, his eyes narrowing. "You say you know what's wrong with Central? Why Communications has been collapsing? You know that?"

"*I know that.*" She smiled, the cold desperate smile. "I've got the whole thing in a nutshell. I can get Central running again in a matter of days. But I need an engineer. I need someone who can handle the machines, someone to handle operations. I need you, Jerry, and I can buy you now. I'll have the power, and I'll have the money." She looked coldly at her fingernails. "I would have preferred Forhan, but he's dead. He called their bluff first thing—told them to go ahead and bomb Central. So they shot him." She shrugged. "He might not have bargained, anyway. But you —" She smiled, the old warm, innocent smile again, "—you're reasonable, Jerry; you can tell a sure thing when you see it."

Hanson sat staring at her for a long moment, his mind racing. She had the answer, she said; she *couldn't* know about the backlog in the "stacks," but she had the answer. And *he* knew that there was insanity in the answer—"I don't believe you, Marly. You must think I'm a fool."

Her eyes blazed, and she was on her feet, furious. "I think you *are* a fool! I'm offering you the chance you'll never have again, Jerry. You can be on top, or you can be down and out. The tables are turning—take your choice."

Careful, he thought. Play it careful—"I can't trust you, Marly." His mind was tight and cold, alive to catch any hint, any slip. "If I could trust you, I might consider it. But I can't trust you. I trusted you once before, back on Centaurus III, and I got kicked in the face." He rubbed his cheek slowly with his forefinger. "I'm not a fool. I only need to be kicked once."

"Forget the past, Jerry! This is now! You can't lose."

"I've got too good a memory to forget the past. And I've got one on you, this time, Marly." A sly smile was on his lips. "If I don't play along in this, you won't go anywhere, either—"

She walked over to him then, slowly, her eyes icy. Her mouth was twisted into a sour grimace, and her voice cut out in bitter contempt, like the edge of an ice cold razor. "Look, Mr. Good-Memory, I don't give a damn for you—I don't like you; I never have liked you. If you want it bluntly, you make my skin crawl. But I want what I can get for myself. I've worked two years for his chance, and I've got to have you to put it across. So I'll bargain with you, for all I've got. You'll be running Central, after I've straightened it out. It'll be in *your* hands. Then, if I pull a fast one, you could QBB the whole works. Join me now, and you can name your terms."

He looked at her, her twisted face, her ice-grey eyes. "All right," he said. "Start bargaining. I want the answer to one question, just one." His eyes narrowed to slits, and he felt the muscles of his arms tighten. "Answer

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one question, and I'm with you."

"What question?"

He took a tight breath. *"Was John Forhan insane?"*

The light died in her eyes, like a match blown out in the wind. She took a deep breath, and her voice was very tired. "Yes," she said. "He was. Forhan, and every single operator that worked in this pest-hole. All of them very much insane."

EVERYBODY said Central was a madhouse," Marly said, lighting a cigarette. "Nobody meant it, literally. But it really is. I got the first substantial clue when Steinthal went into psychotic breakdown, and when I learned about their conditioning program. Then it was a matter of testing to prove it. And it checked through, right up to Forhan."

She smoked in silence for a moment. "They knew that there was danger here from the beginning. The men not only worked under impossible conditions, and under intolerable pressure—they had well drummed into them that the whole machinery of the Union depended on them transmitting messages regularly, smoothly, without a flaw. In order to help them they were psycho-conditioned to protect them from the breakdown that would have occurred in unconditioned men. But they were conditioned for one job, and walked right in to do an immeasurably more difficult job. Their conditioning didn't account for the terrific expansion of Central. As the work and pressure increased, the men began to approach the breaking point, but they knew they *couldn't* break, and they kept on working. There were similar cases in humans during the Terran wars, men cracking under the strain of battle, and transferring their mental breakdown into errors in judgment, irrationality, paralyzed limbs—because they *had to keep on fighting*. In Central the men should have broken up at the seams, but they had to keep Central running, so they went heroic instead. And the farther insane they went, the more desperately convinced they were that nothing at all was wrong with them, that 'everything was under control.' Forhan wouldn't let anyone talk him out of it, how perfectly under control Central Communications was—"

She took a deep breath. "But Central Communications wasn't under control. It was sliding more and more rapidly out of control. But the farther the men slipped away from sanity, the less they were able to realize how the control was slipping. The pressure of the work became increasingly heavier, and heavier, and they sank deeper and deeper."

Hanson stood up, his eyes wide. The missing answer fell into place, the insane answer—and its incredible implications. Like a man in a dream Hanson stood looking out the port, his mind roaring with the only possible line of action. Set Central on its feet in two days? He almost laughed aloud. She might try, and go insane herself in the attempt. But she wouldn't succeed. There was only one way, impossible as it seemed,

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that could ever hope to succeed.

He turned to her, his eyes bright. "All right, Marly," he said cooly. "Send your Arcturian friends back to their ships. We'll turn Central over to them, lock, stock, and barrel, running like it's never run before." His eyes glittered, and his hands were trembling. "Send them back, and then come with me—"

She was back in half a minute, her grey eyes excited. "They're leaving," she said. "They said to remind you that if anything goes wrong they'll order Central bombed out." She smiled grimly. "We won't have any trouble with them. Now what are you planning?"

He searched the equipment locker quickly, pulled out two of the grotesque masks. Hurriedly he tossed one at her. "Come along," he muttered, and threw open the vaulted door to the Inside.

The noise of the clattering machines burst in to meet them as they snapped on the ear and nose guards. Hanson buzzed for a shuttle car, and in a few seconds they were climbing in, zooming up toward the vaulted ceiling. "The first thing to do," said Marly, "is to get the men together and inform them of the change of command. Just tell them that Forhan has been relieved, and that you're giving orders here. Your Interstellar Security identification will convince them that it's all right. Then—" She stopped suddenly, looking sharply at Hanson. "You aren't listening," she said sharply.

"No, I'm not," said Hanson.

She glanced back nervously over her shoulder, at the receding wall, down at the wilderness of clattering teletypes and clicking relays. "Where are you taking us?" she snapped, her voice on edge.

Hanson pointed vaguely ahead. "Down there somewhere."

She was alarmed now. "I think we'd better go down."

He shrugged. "All right." He touched a button, and the car lurched suddenly downward toward the crosswalk. Marly stepped out of the car swiftly. "Now we're going to call the men," she said, thinly.

Hanson shook his head, an odd smile on his lips. "We aren't going anywhere, Marly. We're staying right here." His voice was soft as velvet.

There was fear in her eyes then. "What do you mean? Jerry, do you know what you're doing?"

"Oh, yes. I know what I'm doing. You wouldn't believe it, but I do. And the first step is to *relieve you of this!*" He lunged forward suddenly, snatching the guard mask from her face. The elastic band broke with a snap, and the mask came off in his hand. He could see the panic and horror rise in the girl's eyes as the wave of intolerable sound swept in. She screamed, and her hands went up to her ears, trying to muffle the maddening roar. In panic she snatched at the mask, and then turned into a blonde screaming fury, scratching at his face and hands, her eyes wild with fear. Hanson took her gently by the throat and gave her a sharp shove as she came at him again.

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She tottered backwards, fighting for balance, and fell to the floor, sobbing, pushing at her ears with her fingers as if to drive them through her head, writhing on the floor—

And then Hanson was running toward the codex cubicle. He shoved his Security ID card at the man working at the desk. "Go out and call all the men down here," he snapped. "Tell them to leave their machines and get down here fast. We've got trouble." Without waiting for an answer he dived into the soundproofed visiphone booth in the corner. Swiftly he dialed for a through wire to Sol III. He snapped out the code signal for Interstellar Security, and tapped impatient fingers on the panel as the signal buzzed through. After three eternities Fritz Hebel's face appeared in the clearing screen.

"Hebel," said Hanson. "Listen, now, and do just as I say. This is critical, I mean *critical,* and you'll have to follow instructions to the letter if you want anything saved from this mess. You've been waiting for something to break—this is it."

"Let's have it," snapped Hebel, his voice tight.

"Call the substation on Sol III and tell them to open all their auxiliary channels, every channel that *doesn't* go through Central. Have them open even the channels that haven't been used since the centralization, every channel they can find that messages can be sent over. Then have them broadcast the word to every planet they can reach to open all auxiliary channels. Got that?"

Hebel's face was bewildered. "Yes, I've got it. What else?"

Hanson took a deep breath. "Everything depends on those auxiliary channels—they've *got* to be open. Then get a squadron of fighters ready and warp them through to Luna City. You know about the Arcturian squadron here—send enough to handle them easily."

"So it's breaking," muttered Hebel.

"Yes, it's breaking. Now listen carefully, and don't argue with me. Wait until you see the last ship leave Luna City. I'm ordering the City evacuated, having everyone in Luna City board ships and evacuate to Sol III. As soon as your squadron leaves, call the Galactic Grand Council into emergency session, and place them under heavily armed guard. Don't let anyone contact them about anything, and make sure you have the reserve out to handle an Arcturian attack on Sol III. They might just try it. But the important thing is to *get those ships here,* ready for business as soon as the last ship leaves Luna City."

"Wait a minute!" roared Hebel, his eyes growing wide as Hanson was talking. "Hanson, have you lost your mind. You can't evacuate Luna City. What about Central? You can't run it yourself, you've got to have men. And if we try to attack the Arcturians, they'll bomb Central Communications off the map!"

Hanson was shaking his head excitedly. "The City has to be evacuat-

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ed. I'll be on the last ship that leaves. I've got the answer to the Communications breakdown, Hebel—the whole answer. I know where it was breaking down, and why. And I know the only possible way to solve the problem." He lit a cigarette with shaking fingers. "As soon as I sign off here," he said rapidly, "I'm sending a QBB out on every channel leaving Central. I'll QBB every channel, so the whole Galaxy will know what's happening. Don't worry about what the Arcturians are likely to do, Hebel—you get that squadron here, and fast."

Hebel's eyes were wide. "You mean to attack the Arcturians?"

Hanson shook his head. "That's the *second* step. The first step is to attack Galactic Central Communications. You've got to bomb Central to smithereens."

SHE was still irrational when they left her room and walked down the corridor. "She'll recover, all right," the doctor promised. "Her hearing will never be right again, but there's no serious damage done. She can be turned over to Security in a week or two."

Hebel nodded, and walked with Hanson down the steps of the New Denver Psycho-Medical Clinic. "It was rough on her," Hebel muttered. "We knew she was tied up with the Arcturians, and that something was about to break. We also knew that you disliked her, and would watch her like a hawk. That's why we chose you to work with her. But even considering everything, she's had a tough time."

Hanson shrugged. "I should have left her there," he said coldly. "I don't know why I didn't. But she gave me the final link in the chain of the Communications breakdown, the one thing I couldn't fit into the picture. She told me why no one knew what was happening."

He lit a cigarette, and the breeze caught the smoke as he turned to the Security Chief. "It was a vicious circle. The expanding system brought heavier work to Central, and the heavier the work there the faster the men went insane. Then when the messages began piling up in the 'stacks' they got panicky, and their insanity let them simply ignore the backlog." He took a deep breath. "I saw the trouble when I saw the repair going on, but I couldn't see why. Forhan didn't know about the terrific overload of material in the 'stacks.' Well, Forhan *did* know. He just conveniently forgot it, because if he had recognized it, he would have known that there was only one answer to Communications. The answer he had been fighting all his life. An answer that would have been completely insane, to him. *De*centralization, complete, rapid, and efficient breakdown of the perfect Centralized Communications clearing house that he had worked so hard to build. Because Central Communications had gotten too big. The law of diminishing returns, in a way. The loaded gun that nobody knew about. Central had grown so big, and the system was expanding

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so rapidly that one central clearing house could never hope to keep up with it. And it would constantly and inevitably drive men mad if they tried to keep up with it. *Central had to be destroyed,* because it was destroying itself, and the Interstellar Union along with it."

They walked toward the traffic ramp in silence. "It's a terrible job," said Hebel finally. "It'll be years before you can get the substations and auxiliary lines built up to handle the work, even in limited Sectors. The Union will be shaken to its foundation before you're through." He looked at Hanson. "The job is yours, you know. You asked for it. Nobody else wants it very much."

Hanson smiled. "The Union is already shaken. But it's still a Union, and a strong one. Propaganda will help me; crises arising will tend to bind the Union tighter, until Decentralized Communications can be working at full efficiency." He smiled bitterly at Hebel. "If we can keep the Marly Norgaards and her ilk out of the picture, I think we can get it done."

Hebel watched him narrowly as he turned to go down the ramp to the traffic. The cool night air scurried along the curved boulevard of the Capitol City of Sol III, and far in the distance a rocket rose on its orange tail, higher and higher into the night sky. "You really hated that woman, didn't you?" said Hebel.

Hanson flipped the cigarette away savagely, and started down the slope. "I had a right to," he said, over his shoulder. "I knew her too well. She was once my wife."

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You collect science-fiction magazines? Better hang on to them, they may come in handy some day. Take Willard Thorpe, for instance, his collection was a big help when he had to take—and dish out—a little

PATENT MEDICINE

By William C. Bailey

"YOU may go in now," the tall one with the plain brassiere said. Willard Thorpe, rehearsing for the tenth time what he wanted to say to Faulkner, did not hear her.

"Mr. Thorpe," she repeated, tapping her desk with a finger. "Mr. Faulkner can see you now." The other receptionist, the one with metallic cone bra cups, looked up and tittered.

He got too hurriedly to his feet, patting at the letter inside his bolero jacket. His old-fashioned external corrective lenses slipped down his nose. Pushing them back angrily, he went through the big wooden door labeled "President."

Faulkner's huge office was rich, mellowed by tasteful antiques. He sat behind a massive old desk of rosewood that loomed darkly out of the thick carpet. He was big from the waist up, a man who had added comfortable flesh to potent muscles in middle years. His face was square, heavy, and dominated by a powerful, slightly hooked nose.

"Yes?" he rumbled, straightening in the high-backed old director's chair. His features were suddenly concentrated, not necessarily unfriendly. Thorpe could almost feel him take inventory of his appearance—the horn-rimmed glasses; the bolero jacket; the tasteful culottes of chartreuse and cerise; the conservative boots, heels under two inches, and coming barely half way to the knee. There was a flicker of some emotion he could not place as Faulkner noted he wore no spurs.

"Willard Thorpe, Mr. Faulkner. Your Mr. Purvis sent me up from Personnel. He thought you should see me. Uh, I mean . . ." He choked and stumbled, knowing he had said it backwards.

Faulkner moved his big shoulders irritably, settling his magenta-figured

Illustrated by W. E. Terry

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Lolly jacket on his frame. Thorpe, hearing the dull clank of spurs under the old desk, wished again he had worn his.

"Oh?" he said. "You're an employee here, Thorpe?"

"No, sir. Actually, I'm applying for employment."

"The devil you are. McReady is supposed to handle Purvis' slop-over. And Purvis thought *you* should see *me?*" he asked, setting it straight.

"Yes, sir. I don't have the scientific degree you usually require—my Doctor's thesis was in literature—but Mr. Purvis thought—"

"Literature! What the devil!" Faulkner broke in brusquely. "No, Thorpe. I'm sorry. We hire lots of Ph. D's, but if they aren't engineers, they're chemists, physicists. As for writers, all our advertising is handled by Poop, Inc."

"Please, Mr. Faulkner," Thorpe said, fearful he would be rushed out before he said his piece. "You see, I *do* have some scientific background." Faulkner's scowl dwindled, but his big square face was still uninterested, impatient, irritated. "My field was science fiction," Thorpe said hurriedly. "Literature with a scientific background. My thesis subject was 'The Golden Age of Science Fiction.' Well, to do a good job, I've had to study a good deal in most fields of science, so that—"

"Now, Thorpe," Faulkner said, slapping big palms on the desk. "A lot of outdated, disproven facts—"

"But it's not like that at all," Thorpe said warmly, ignoring Faulkner's growing irritation at the interruptions. "In the first place, science was pretty well advanced in the Nineteenth and Twentieth . . . Well, that's not important, really," he said, finally recognizing the danger signs on Faulkner's face. "The important thing is that science fiction in those days was concerned with science in the future—the science of today. The writers dreamed up or tried to imagine all sorts of inventions and gadgets, and sooner or later a lot of them got invented. Of course, there were just thousands of ideas that we now know were absolutely contrary to physical laws, but in those days—"

"Useless here," Faulkner cut him off. "What ever made Purvis think . . ." He reached for the buzzer.

"Well," said Thorpe reluctantly. "It might have been this." He drew the letter from within his black bolero and passed it over the rich desk. His glasses slipped foolishly down his nose.

"What's this?" Faulkner grumbled, opening it to see.

"You remember Edward Hines," he said hopefully. "Well, we got to be pretty good friends at the University, and he said he thought you could use me, so he wrote that letter."

"Hines? Ed Hines? Who the hell is . . . Oh. Hm. Ed Hines, sure." He looked up, still holding the letter befor him. "How come you know an old duffer like Hines?"

Thorpe coughed nervously, getting his horn-rims straight again. "We were both collectors, you see—"

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"Collectors?"

"Yes," he explained. "Everybody in my family collects something. Dad has the . . . Well, that's not important, either," he said quickly, killing another scowl in mid-course. "Hines and I both collect old issues of science fiction magazines. Between us, we must own three-quarters of the Twentieth Century stuff in existence."

"Hmph," Faulkner snorted. "And what's this about your inventing something?" he pursued, poking at the letter with a thick finger.

"Well, it's only half worked out," Thorpe said, beginning to think he had found Faulkner's wave length at last. "Hines encouraged me with it. It's a little improvement in the Zero-[illegible]d insulation process. They have [illegible]ble making the insulation stick, [illegible]ou know. I figure the static bleeders don't do a good enough job. Actually, there are a number of ways I've doped out to lick it. It's just a question of cost and convenience."

"You've doped it out, eh?" Faulkner said sarcastically, raising his powerful beak. "How?" he snapped with disconcerting directness.

Thorpe struggled with the technical explanation, feeling his claim to scientific background was under the microscope. The big man pierced and lit a green-dappled cigar as Thorpe unfolded his idea. His big jaw chomped at the cigar, and he clouded his brooding, enigmatic expression with smoke.

"Well, Thorpe," Faulkner said grudgingly, taking the cigar from his face when Thorpe had finished. "Some of the science must have stuck to you at that. Hm. Maybe old Ed knows what he's doing." An idea was tempting the big man, Thorpe could tell. He held his breath.

Faulkner chuckled and nodded briefly to himself. "Tell you what, Willard," he said almost amiably. "I can take a flyer as quick as the next guy. Maybe there's a spot for a young fellow like you around here at that. Let's give Purvis a start!" He leaned toward the televox.

IT was hard to believe that two weeks had gone by when he got his first check. It seemed only hours since he had sat in a surprised Purvis' office in Personnel and struggled over his Social Security form, his tax deductions, his powers of attorney, his loyalty affidavit, his employment contract, literally dozens of them. It was enormously encouraging to know that he had found a way to become a part of the economic system. He grinned and patted the check through is jacket.

His third week started off with a bang. They had given him a desk, with a dictaphone and a file-dialer, and put him to work answering inquiries from far off places that asked about products Universal didn't make. It was a sort of public relations job, and the pay had been unexpectedly good. He was supposed to get off polite, helpful letters that said Universal was sorry, but did the writer think of trying Whosis, Ltd., who made a dandy line of this or that

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kind of snivvy?

He looked up from a letter some miner of Ganymede had painfully scrawled, asking for something that didn't exist, and by the nature of things couldn't, and which wouldn't have done the job he had in mind anyway, to see that Purvis had seated himself on the corner of his desk.

"Hello, Willard," he said, passing over a piece of paper. "How about signing this assignment for me? You're lucky, boy. I'll say!" He flashed a momentary, mechanically insincere grin at Thorpe.

Ogling the paper through is horn-rims, Thorpe asked, "Assignment?"

"Yeah, sure, Willard. That slick process of yours for making Zero-cond stick to the cable. The old man himself put the boys on it, and they think you have something. They're patenting it."

"*They* are?"

"Why, sure, Willard,"

"Well, wait a minute, Mr. Purvis," Thorpe protested, feeling his glasses slip down his nose. "That's *my* invention! I've got some thoughts of patenting it myself."

Purvis let the grin simmer down to a smile. "Not any more, Willard," he said, pulling his culottes over one knee boyishly. He wore dull copper spurs on his knee-high boots, and they tinkled as he moved.

Thorpe said: "What do you mean?"

The boyish grin was back, as insincerely out of place as Purvis' collegiate cox-comb and blazer-striped vestee. "Well, now that you work for Universal, boy, anything you perfect you have to sell to the Corporation for a dollar. That's right in your employment contract."

"Sure," Thorpe said intently. "I know. All Corporations do that. But just because I hadn't dotted every 'I' and crossed every 'T'—"

"What the hell, Willard, you work here now. You'll get a bonus. Universal isn't a hog. I'll bet the Committee awards you five hundred or a thousand bucks. The old man says it's a pretty cute idea."

"Well, I still think it stinks," Thorpe said stiffly, ramming his glasses back up the slope of his nose. "And as for perfecting it, that's a lousey technicality. Mr. Faulkner knows I could have signed a dummy assignment to somebody the day before I started here, and kept it for myself."

"Well, you didn't and it belongs to Universal. Now look," Purvis said, suddenly impatient. "Sign the damned thing and take your buck."

Thorpe slammed both palms down on the desk. "I won't!" he said truculently. "Now listen, you tell Mr. Faulkner I think this is a dirty deal! I want to talk to him!"

"To Faulkner? Nobody talks to Faulkner, Willard. McReady, maybe, but not Faulkner."

"I talk to Faulkner. He hired me, remember? Now, darn it, tell him I want to talk to him!"

Purvis shrugged with his eyebrows. "Okay, sucker," he said with a jape. "You asked for it." He scuffed a rowel angrily on the floor, leaving

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a row of little dents in the composition, and strode bouncily away.

Thorpe was too angry to think about the pretty girls outside the President's door when Faulkner sent for him. He hadn't long to wait before being shown into the huge, carpeted office of the President.

Faulkner was not alone. A slender, grey-haired intense man sat at one corner of the huge inlaid desk. They both looked up, annoyance plain, as he rushed in. The big expanse of carpet made him feel silly, and he slowed down to a normal walk.

"Hello, Thorpe," Faulkner said curtly, leaning back from the papers he had been looking at with the grey-haired man. "Now what the devil?"

Thorpe swallowed away a fuzzy, lump in his throat and took a quick look at the stranger before he replied. Perhaps this was McReady. He wore a fringed buckskin jacket and white antelope boots with heels no higher than Thorpe's. He had crossed his legs, and was idly spinning a hammered silver rowel.

"It's about my invention, Mr. Faulkner," Thorpe said, deciding he might as well go ahead with it. "The Zero-cond process."

"What about it?"

"Mr. Purvis has asked me to assign it to the Corporation."

"Then you'd better. That all?" His square features did not glower, but Thorpe was shaken by the cold, friendless tone of his voice. The man who might have been McReady gave him an acid, pitiless grin.

"Mr. Faulkner, you know I had that idea all worked out before I came here. It isn't fair to take it from me that way. I'm quite willing to sell—"

"Not fair? The devil! You signed a contract."

Thorpe pressed forward against the desk. "That's a technicality, that's all," he protested. "It seems to me—"

"Would you like me to leave, A.J.?" the thin man asked scratchily, showing by an idle spin of the silver rowel that he thought he shouldn't.

"No," Faulkner bawled roughly. "Now, see here. What the hell can you do about it? You signed the contract. We're holding you to it. You took your pay, didn't you?"

"I won't sign," Thorpe said sullenly. "I'm getting legal advice."

"Oh, for Pete's sake." Faulkner stormed. "What do you think we are? A bunch of crooks? We don't need your lousey signature. Your static bleeder was pretty well described in print thirty or forty years ago, anyway, enough so's we could fight any claims you make. If you want to buy a lawsuit, go ahead and patent it. But get your time from Purvis when you leave tonight. You're through."

The bottom had dropped out. Thorpe had come to the office with no idea of letting things get so far out of hand.

"Gosh!" he gasped, conscious of how young he sounded. "I don't want to quit. I like it here, Mr. Faulkner. I enjoy my job. It's a swell—"

"I don't like your attitude," Faulk-

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ner said, turning back to the thin man with the silver spurs.

"Well, I know we've had a little misunderstanding, but—"

"Do I have to spell it out, you simpleton," Faulkner growled, while the other chuckled silently at the silver rowel he was still spinning. "What do you think I hired you for? Your brains? We wanted the idea. All right, you want to make it hard. So we don't want you. Now get the hell out of here, I'm busy."

Back in his small apartment, Thorpe began to get the full impact of what it meant to lose his first job. Oh, it wasn't a question of going hungry. He had a little money, and his parents wouldn't stand for it, anyway. But it was darned awkward, embar[illegible]sing and a little alarming. He [illegible]ly hadn't handled himself like a twenty-five-year-old, he reflected. A little smoother approach to Faulkner, perhaps . . .

But then he told himself that wouldn't have worked, either. Faulkner had no illusions. He had been painfully blunt about why they had hired him at all. Really, that was the nastiest part of the whole thing.

It was a dirty trick, any way you sliced it. But how to take the next step in making a living was still a poser. He decided he didn't want any part of a big corporation. He had had a look at what it means to be soulless. Actually, he had been a pretty small pawn in the whole game. What had Faulkner said? The process had been described or suggested in print years before. That meant right away that it probably wasn't patentable. The Corporation had only wanted to establish a nuisance patent, perhaps hoping others wouldn't know of the printed description. Well, whatever their angle was, it wasn't flattering.

Thorpe looked disgustedly around him. He was in no mood to look for work that day. And in no mood to do much else. His eyes lit on the bookcase he had had shipped from home, with its carefully jacketed copies of antique magazines.

They always relaxed him. What hobby doesn't? He picked an old volume at random from the bottom shelf, careful not to crack its sleazy fragility, and opened to a story. He read for some time, almost recapturing the old thrill. Its language was stilted, its conception of the w[illegible] of some future date funny to an[illegible] one but a connoisseur. Halfway through the tale, the printed words stopped him cold.

There, in black and white, was a reasonably decent explanation of how narrow-necked vessels could be machined on the inside with a cutter of larger effective radius than the neck of the vessel. He laid the book down thoughtfully. Use of the process was new, and he recalled a recent inquiry about it that he had forwarded to the proper division of Universal Manufacturing. His stomach began to tremble. A perfectly gorgeous way to take revenge on Faulkner formed in his mind.

A long-distance call informed him that the Jergens-Tamli cutter was

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patented, and that Universal Manufacturing was the assignee of the patent. Perfect!

It took three days to get back in to see Faulkner. The pretty girls in the lush outer office were a lot less than pretty when they were saying, "I'm sorry, but he's not available," and a lot of other politely cold remarks to the same effect.

"Now look," Thorpe said, trembling with exasperation, to the shorter one, the one who always wore ornate metallic cone bras. "I know Mr. Faulkner is in there. I've heard him bellowing around half the morning. You take him a note, or I'll *just* in there!" His horn-rims slipped ridiculously down his sweating nose.

She squared her shoulders and stuck the copper cones at him. "I'm not used to being talked to that way!" she said icily. "Mr. Faulkner does not wish to see you. Is that plain?"

Thorpe regarded the cones owlishly through his glasses, newly pushed straight. Probably flat-chested, he decided, and wore tinnies to kid the public. "What I said still goes," he said, still shaking inside. He took his stylus from his pocket and quickly handed her a short note.

"All right!" she snapped after a long moment. "And stop *staring* at me!" Somehow that made him feel better.

Nobody was behind the big desk. Faulkner came charging powerfully through a door connecting with another office as Thorpe made for the massive antique. He wore short accordion-pleated boots with stirrup-cut heels. Heavy spurs glinted with the richness of pure gold, and clanked dully.

Thorpe realized with surprise that the barrel-chested man was quite short, two or three inches less in height than his own five feet nine. He tried a glower of his own down at the older man, angrily deciding he should have worn spurs himself.

"Damned good thing you saw me!" he blustered, realizing sickly that his voice had merely quavered with the strain.

It amused Faulkner, but not much. He sat down behind the fabulous old desk, suddenly big and impressive again.

"I know a threatening letter when I see one," he said coldly. "I'll give you one minute to crawl out of here on your belly, or I'll call the police."

"One minute? All right. In the first fifty-nine seconds I'll tell you this, Mr. Faulkner." He immediately regretted the "Mr.", but the damage was done. He saw the gleam in the other's eye.

"You people use the Jergens-Tamli process for machining narrow-necked vessels. Well, so maybe you're such a big wheel you don't know what it is, but the patent is assigned to you. I looked it up. And you use it in the plant. Well, it isn't patentable. I'm going to tell any licensees you've got that the patent's no good, and show them how to break it!"

Taking his hands off the polished rosewood, Faulkner leaned back in

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the high-topped director's chair, his head resting against the rich old leather. "You've got patents on the brain," he observed.

Thorpe recognized the statement for an admission of weakness. Faulkner never made remarks. He either told you or he asked you.

The minute was gone, and nobody had called the police.

"That invention was described in print over two hundred years ago," Thorpe said. "All right, maybe their technological level was such they couldn't make the tool, but they described it. The patent's no good."

"Where?" snapped Faulkner, going to the heart of the matter at once. He was asking again.

"A science fiction magazine. Nineteen fifty-three. June, 1953, issue of 'Futureways,' a story called INSIDE OUT, by Charles Fox. I've got a copy. Now what do you think of that?"

His insides simmered like a kettle on a stove. He hadn't realized how furious he was with the treatment he had received.

"I'll tell you," Faulkner said, taking the other tack in the asking-telling game. "You're an idiot. I don't know anything about the damned process, but from what you describe of it, I'll bet our royalties are every bit of five hundred dollars a year. Do you think the firms we've licensed it to are going to start a fight with us over a lousy couple of hundred bucks? What do you think patents are, just a dog-in-the-manger deal? Hell, all big corporations own hundreds of them. Some they use, some they license to others who can use them better. What the devil! You'd find out damned quick if you tried to get one of our licensees to finance a court fight that they probably license a dozen of their own patents to Universal! And I'll tell you one more thing, you insolent pup, you'll never work in a manufacturing company, any corporation I've ever heard of, in this country. I'll black-ball you from Nome to Balboa. Is that enough?"

It was plenty. Thorpe couldn't remember the rest of the words, but they all meant he was getting the hell out of the door before the cops got there.

The grisly thing about it was that Faulkner apparently had made no idle threat. After a couple weeks of looking vainly for jobs, Thorpe decided to try another city. A few times he got to the point of having his applications considered pretty seriously, but suddenly the opening was filled, or the job evaporated, or he was curtly told they didn't want any part of him.

Oh, there was never any explanation, but as the weeks lengthened into several months, and Thorpe, seeing his rather slender resources dwindle, tried to get any kind of a job, no matter how little skill or training it took, it became all too apparent that he had been black-balled.

It wasn't universal. It didn't reach into the service industries, or perhaps Faulkner was satisfied to have him tend a battery of dishwashing

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machines in a big hotel. The pay was certainly low enough.

One week of handling racks of hot vitrolite dishes was all he had stomach for. When he got his pay check, and looked at the miserable amount left after all the deductions, he could not help but recall the generous salary he had gotten at Universal. He laughed bitterly. The check in his hand was the second pay check of his life. If he had only had some sense, and not made a fuss about the Zero-cond patent, he would probably still have been in that good-paying job, probably with a bonus check for a thousand in the bank, and with a chance to show them that he had something on the ball.

He wasn't going to get anywhere washing dishes. He couldn't meet expenses on his pay. Gloomily he decided that he should return to his parents' home. The thing would blow over in while, or he might get another break, such as he had gotten when Ed Hines had written to Faulkner in his behalf.

Thinking of Hines brought his mind around to his collection of science fiction. He would have to get the books crated and arrange to have them shipped home. They were too precious, to Thorpe at least, to leave in storage somewhere.

Back in his apartment, he fingered the transparent jackets over the old, brittle paper covers. His university days seemed far away. The pleasure, the intellectual excitement of his researches, seemed part of another world. Nostalgically, he wished he were back there, his nose deep in "Futureways." Well, it was gone. The old thrill of finding invention after modern invention described in writing hundreds of years old was no longer a part of his life.

Or was it? Once before the idea had cost him dearly. He wondered if he should even let it seep back into his mind. Still, what did he have to lose?

This time he intended to move with care. He would think it through to the bitter end, and then act. It would take money, that was the trouble, money, and some know-how that he did not have. He decided to get them both in the same place.

There was, of course, the problem of choosing the man. He went to the offices of the largest newscast house in the city, and read their back issues. There were, he found by using the file selectors, an amazing number of lawsuits involving fraud, bribery and intimidation. And of them, a significantly large percentage of cases were defended by an attorney named Hobart Cribb.

Taking precaution first to store his collection of science fiction in a bonded warehouse, he carried with him to Cribb's none-too-resplendent offices a copy of his Doctor's thesis.

Cribb somehow looked like his name. The first impression he gave was of bookish integrity, perhaps heightened by old fashioned horn-rimmed spectacles similar to those that Thorpe wore. The young man was startled at the false air they carried on second look, and made a

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note to discard his own for more conventional contact lenses at an early date. It was more than the horn-rims that made him think twice about Cribb. There was a mechanical quality to the attorney's laugh, a narrowing of his eyes while talking, and, most of all, an almost obscene melon of a belly that jutted from his otherwise spare frame.

"Willard Thorpe," he introduced himself. "I think I need a lawyer."

Cribb's eyes narrowed behind the clear panes of glass. "What did you do?" His bony fingers clasped the stiff edges of his chain-mail jacket as he leaned back in his spidery chair.

"I haven't done it. I want to do it, and I want to stay out of trouble."

"Don't we all!" Cribb laughed, suddenly hearty. "Yes, sir, Willard," he exclaimed, slapping his bloated abdomen. "We'd all love to!" The levity left his voice in a flash. He straightened his glasses, as if for a closer look. "This kind of talk usually calls for some earnest money. Let's see the color of yours."

"But that's the point," Thorpe protested, leaning forward and clumsily catching his seldom-worn spurs in the carpet. "I want to *get* some money, not pay any. Am I being awfully literal about this thing?" He was unhappily aware of the earnestness of his voice.

"Hm," Cribb said, looking at him over the tops of the frames. Thorpe thought the lawyer was puzzled.

"Look," he went on. "I'm pretty sure I've got a fool-proof way to get some money out of one of the big corporations. It's not that I'm stealing it, either. They gave me a raw deal, and they owe it to me. You know how to handle things like that. If you can swing it for me, I can pay you out of what I get."

Cribb slowly drew the horn-rimmed temples from over his ears and pressed the spectacles against his left shoulder. His naked eyes drilled Thorpe with mixed outrage and wonder. "In all my long legal career," Cribb said, shaking his head from side to side as he spoke, "which I may say has been widely varied, I've never had a prospective client with more gall. You walk in here, asking me how to break the law and go free, and you want me to advise you on a contingent basis!" He burst into rude guffaws, his melon-belly bobbing up and down indecently.

"But I don't want to break any laws."

Cribb's pinched face sobered. The glasses were popped back on his pointed nose. He peered at Thorpe, two fingers still on the frames, as if they enlarged him by a hundred magnifications. "You don't what?" he gasped at last. "Haw! Then you came to the wrong man!" The glasses were whipped off as he leaned far back and howled with laughter. "Go on," he said, straightening up without a trace of merriment. "What is it?"

"Universal Manufacturing Corporation owns or controls hundreds of valuable patents. I know a way to break a gang of them. I should think

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they'd be willing to pay me not to."

A thin, whitish tongue passed over Cribb's lips. He pushed his shoulders against the back of his chair and studied Willard Thorpe through still narrower eyes. "Not if they had any sense," he said at last. "They'd squeeze you into the position of trying to extort from them, and your jig would be up."

"Why do you think I'm here?" Thorpe snapped, irritated by the other's flippant mannerisms. He began to think he had picked the wrong man.

"You're serious about breaking these patents?"

"Yes. Look this over. My Doctor's thesis. I'll tell you this," he began, and related the appearance in print hundreds of years before of good descriptions of many modern patents. "That's the law, isn't it?" Thorpe demanded. "You can't patent anything described in print, can you? That means it's not *new,* and that's one of the conditions of a patentable invention, that it's *new.*"

"More or less," Cribb admitted. His flip manner disappeared and the lawyer in him showed through more clearly. He slid down in his spindly chair and put his hand-carved boots up on the desk. Thorpe saw that his spurs had a single sharpened tine instead of a rowel. The desk top, he realized, was a replaceable slab of cork already well-scarred by frequent spurrings.

"The law," said Cribb, "Goes on the theory that a patent is a contract between Government and inventor. Government gives the inventor a monopoly for a period of years in return for his disclosure of the invention, since his invention would otherwise become public property, under common law, immediately after its disclosure. Some printed references are disclosures. Most of them, in fact."

"Okay," Thorpe said, relieved by Cribb's more businesslike manner. "So I was close. Now, I'll have to do some research to find out exactly what patents owned by Universal are described in the old science fiction magazines. When I get it together, you figure out how to get some money out of Universal. Not a lot," he explained primly. "But they have kept me from getting a decent job because I wouldn't knuckle under, and I figure they have to make it up to me."

Cribb wagged his narrow head slowly from side to side. "You'd have to have something to sell," he cautioned softly.

"Good enough. What?"

Cribb picked up the thesis and leafed through a few of the typed pages. He found a cigarette, lit it, and smoked absently, blinking at the smoke as he nodded briefly to himself.

"These things take thought," he observed to no one in particular. "We need something to hang our hat on. Here you are, a struggling young scholar. Hm." He let his voice die down to nothing. "And here they are," he added at last. "A big wealthy corporation. Now that adds

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up to . . ."

His face took on a gamin look. A crooked little smile teased at his cheek. "Yes, it adds up," he concluded, shutting the thesis and tossing it to the battered cork.

"Universal is like a lot of big corporations, I should judge," he went on. "They spend millions on research, and they are smart enough to know that pure research pays off, too. They give scholarships in the technical schools, and so on. Very public-spirited. And damned good public relations.

"Now, how about this, Willard? You're young and impecunious. You're digging into the history of inventions. Very pure and scholarly. You've run out of dough. You think of that great benefactor of learning, Universal. You ask them to subsidize you while you finish your great research. Of course, you can show them an incomplete manuscript, with just enough in it to scare them to death. Now, if we play dumb enough, wholesome enough and naive enough, we'll never have to spell it out. After all, big corporations don't pay blackmail. They can't explain it to their auditors. But if they are scared, and we give them something to hang their hat on, they'll buy in, very public-spirited and all, with the tiny little proviso that, having paid for the deal, they get the rights to it. That way, well, hell, Willard, I don't have to spell it out for you. We'll be in a safe position whichever way the cat jumps. If they get dense and just say 'No,' that'll be time enough to figure out the next degree of pressure."

The secret smile was now a thin, sharp grin. He had bent forward over the chewed-up surface of the desk as he concluded, until the chain-mail touched its edge. "Eh?" he demanded sharply.

Thorpe could not help but be excited by Cribb's enthusiasm. "You've sold *me*," he grinned back. This was more like it. Cribb was a different man when he smelled money. "Now," said Thorpe confidently. "Spot me a thousand or so to live on while I dig up the facts, and I'll cut you in on what we get."

Cribb stayed half-sprawled across the cork desk-top. His eyes made tiny slits behind the horn-rims. "What kind of a cut?" he almost whispered. Thorpe breathed a sigh of relief. Cribb was going to take the deal.

WITH some help on the tone of the thing, to guard against any hint of extortion, he had a fair rough draft in two months. He insisted on going with his attorney to the carefully planned first meeting with Faulkner.

"I want to see his face, Mr. Cribb," he said tensely. "The skunk tried to run me into the ground, and I want to see him squirm."

Perhaps because Cribb did not mention Thorpe, they got an appointment easily. Faulkner's eyes glowered on either side of his meaty nose when he saw his former employee.

"What the hell is that punk doing

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here?" he demanded.

"Still asking," said Thorpe, hoping the flutter in his insides didn't show.

"You shut up!"

"And telling, too," he added.

"Now, now, gentlemen," Cribb said, with a warning glance to his client that made Thorpe's stomach tighten even more. "Mr. Thorpe is, in a way of speaking, my client."

"That damned Zero-cond process again?" Faulkner asked.

"No. No, Mr. Faulkner, nothing like that. Perhaps I should explain why I am here. Not as a lawyer, I should say first off. Rather as a friend whose advice has been sought by this young man. I gave him that advice, only to learn that there was some difference outstanding between you. My only hope is that I can serve as the agent to help you ignore that difference today."

"Now what the devil," Faulkner said with exasperation.

"You know Mr. Thorpe is a writer," Cribb went on smoothly. "He has been working on a new book, and quite frankly, he's run out of funds. Not that I'm serving as a literary agent—that's entirely out of my field. But I did suggest to Mr. Thorpe that he might find help from one of the big corporations. And you surely are aware how well known Universal's bequests to foundations and students are. I suggested he come here."

"Damned poor advice," Faulkner snorted. "I'm sorry—"

"Now the book Thorpe is working on," Cribb went on, ignoring Faulkner entirely. "Is tentatively entitled 'History of Modern Patents.'"

"I might have guessed it. This moron has patents on the brain."

"How true," Cribb said with a conciliatory chuckle. "But he has some sense with it. It really surprised me, on reading his rough draft, how many of our modern, and valuable, patents were conceived many years ago, and described in print. Think of that."

The big square face set like a cooling melt. "So?"

"Well, it's an interesting development. A specialized study, I suppose you might say, one that would interest only those in the patent field. But pure research has paid wonderful dividends in the laboratory, Mr. Faulkner. Why not in the library as well? Mr. Thorpe, very frankly, is hoping he can get some forward-looking corporation to subsidize the added research necessary to make his work truly definitive."

There was a long, puzzled moment of silence. Thorpe was hard put to it to keep a grin from his face. Cribb was completely unconcerned. He gave it the polite, interested treatment of a public-spirited citizen, no heat, not too much fervor.

"Now, one more thing," he added, as an afterthought. "I know you have to sell ideas like this to your Directors, or your Operating Committee, or whatever controls things at Univeral. And I think you have something to hang your hat on. A surprising number of modern patents which Mr. Thorpe has found described in

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old writings belong to Universal. A small point, but one to please your auditors." He smiled happily.

"You don't say!" Faulkner breathed, his face darkening. "A surprising number, you say?"

"Yes. Quite understandable, I suppose. After all, Thorpe worked for you people, and got familiar with the processes you used. He is convinced, of course, that he would find the same true of other corporations after he has done further research."

His glasses came off with a smooth gesture, and he regarded Faulkner expectantly. His only outward sign of tension was an unthinking plucking at the carpet with the sharp tine of a spur.

Faulkner sat like a statue, his eyes going from one of his callers to the other. His big torso broke into motion with a startling jerk.

"McReady!" he bawled, switching on the televox. "McReady! Get in here and drag a couple lawyers with you!"

"Well, damn it," he continued with obvious irritation. "I can see that I badly underestimated you, Thorpe."

"I'm afraid we don't understand," Cribb said rather hurriedly, before Thorpe could speak.

"Sure," said Faulkner, his face getting grim. "Sure you don't." He took a deep breath and forced a smile onto the lower half of his big face. "I guess I know when I might get put in a corner. And that's the time when I shut up and let the lawyers do the talking." Suiting action to the word, he settled back in his director's chair and folded his arms across his Lolly jacket. His level, hard gaze was solely on Cribb.

"Um," said the lawyer cautiously, slitting his eyes. "An example which I suppose you think I should follow?"

"Suit *yourself*," Faulkner shrugged. "I know what I'll say in front of Thorpe and what I won't, if that's what you mean."

"All very puzzling, of course," Cribb smiled. "But I think I can see clearly what my obligation to my young friend is."

"Your client, you mean."

"Well, I am sure he'd be guided by me," Cribb admitted. He turned to Thorpe. "Willard," he said, putting his glasses back on and firing a forceful glance at him. "I'm afraid the misunderstanding between you and Mr. Faulkner is such that your interests would be advanced more rapidly in your absence." He smiled thinly. "In other words, why not let me handle this from here on?"

"I think I'd like to hear it," Thorpe suggested, not sure of his cue.

"How true," Cribb agreed, nodding strongly. "But apparently Mr. Faulkner feels that he and I can come to some kind of arrangement here and now, without the need of his consulting his Directors. Isn't that so, Mr. Faulkner?"

"Something like that," he said, rocking in the chair.

"What do you say, Willard?"

"Oh, sure," he said, getting too quickly to his feet. They were making him feel young and foolish again.

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Things were a little ahead of plan, but Cribb appeared to have the situation in his palm.

He left, with only one knowing glance at the flat-chested receptionist with the big metal bra cups. There might be something there at that, he mused magnanimously, feeling a lot better about the world.

CRIBB called him late in the afternoon. "Better come to my office," he said, scowling into the transmitter.

"Well?" Thorpe demanded, the instant he faced Cribb across the spur-scarred desk. "How'd we do?"

"Not *all* bad," Cribb said irritably. "Why didn't you tell me what a mare's nest you were leading me into?"

"What?" Thorpe gasped.

"You got me in a hell of a pickle, that's what!" Cribb exclaimed, suddenly angry. He whipped off his glasses and threw them bouncingly to the cork desk top.

"Now wait a minute," Thorpe protested. "Didn't they make an offer?"

"Sure. Sure they did."

"Well, then you're right. It *wasn't* all bad."

"Hah!" He snatched the glasses up. "They made an offer all right! They offered to give us a general release from prosecution if we sign over all rights to the book, give them your collection of magazines, and agree to stay out of their hair, their friends' hair, their relatives' hair and their friends' relatives' hair!"

Thorpe fell back in his chair. "I don't get it," he moaned. "How can they—"

"Conspiracy!" Cribb yelled at him, pounding the glasses back on his nose. "They've got me over a barrel, damn it!"

"You?"

"Sure. What a sucker they made out of me! They claim they can make me testify that we got together to plan a scheme against them specifically. And they can make it stick. They can prove I financed you. That takes me out of the status of an attorney, makes me a party to a conspiracy, and that way I can't claim our conversations were privileged. I'd have to tell the court the whole damned story!" He heaved a tremulous sigh. "We're in a mess!"

With long blinkings behind his glasses, Thorpe digested what he had been told. Slowly it added up.

"All right," he said wearily. "I should have known not to go up against Faulkner. What do I do?"

"Sign the agreement. Take the release and be damned glad to get it. You could get in a lot of trouble."

"You could sure get me there," Thorpe said bitterly.

"Now, wait a minute," Cribb protested, pulling off his glasses.

"Oh, shut up!" Thorpe shrilled angrily. "And stop waving those damned fake glasses at me! So you're the smartest lawyer in town! And it only took Faulkner ten minutes to give you the licking of your life! But I'll tell you this: I'll agree to drop anything that's described in that book, or any future action on

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any patents they own, but I won't leave science fiction alone! It's the only thing I really care about. They don't get my collection. Just wrap it up so I keep my books. I'll agree to anything they say about their patents."

Cribb wearily replaced his horn-rims. "All right," he said, much subdued. "I'll see what I can do."

"You'll *do* it!" Thorpe growled. "Or I'll get you set down for malpractice myself. Who retained you, anyway?"

"Hm," said Cribb, skewering him with a glance over the top of his glasses. "An interesting question. What was the amount of that retainer again, Mr. Thorpe?"

It seemed a good note to leave on. Thorpe snarled wordless, almost tearful frustration and got out.

Still, after a week of jockeying back and forth, while he refused to give ground, Thorpe got the agreement in the form he had demanded, and kept his treasured collection of science fiction.

The moment he had the release in his hand, he bought time on the next newscast and in the printed papers, and ran a small advertisement:

"PATENT ADVISORY SERVICE. Do your competitors enjoy a patent advantage over you? Do the big corporations keep you out of your natural market with patent log-jams? Consult Willard Thorpe, expert at unraveling patent snarls."

Other than Faulkner's prompt televoxing, he got no response to it.

Faulkner's big, powerfully-beaked face glowered from the clearing screen. "What the devil," he barked. "Are you begging for a term in prison?"

"I don't get you," Thorpe said, peering through his horn-rims.

"You agreed to leave this patent business alone," Faulkner told him.

"Sure. I faithfully promise I'll never have anything to do with any patents you own."

"Well, then, what's this advertisement of yours?"

"Oh, there are millions of other patents, Faulkner," Thorpe said, relishing omission of the "Mr."

"Oh."

"Of course," Thorpe continued brightly, drawing his glasses off his nose in the best Cribb manner. "Of course, you might be a licensee under some of them. That I couldn't guarantee."

"What about it?" Faulkner growled, his voice dropping low.

"Well, as you said yourself, Faulkner, big corporations license patents they own to others. And they get the right to use the patents of others under license. Now, it would be too bad, I'll admit that right off, if one of your big ventures depended on some patent you are using under license. Yes, sir, it would break me up something awful if some small business-man who would like to get in on the gravy of making tungsten castings asked me to break the patent under which you are a licensee. Knock hell out of the price of tungsten castings!"

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"You can't do that, you puppy!" Faulkner stormed.

"What?" Thorpe demanded, replacing the glasses and peering at Faulkner as if he were a wriggling insect.

"You heard me, damn it. And stop waving—"

Thorpe's roar of laughter cut him off. "Sure I can do it. Ask Cribb," he replied.

The invitation was irresistible. Faulkner's head swung to something out of range of his transmitter. "What about that, Cribb?" he snapped, and then tried to catch himself.

"Shut up!" he heard Cribb's voice strain weakly, obviously some feet away from the microphone.

"Too late, you boob!" Thorpe rubbed it in. "I heard him."

Cribb's pointed features, plainly furious, bulged into the screen in front of Faulkner's, but only for an instant. One heave of the big man's hand swept him out of view again.

"How did you know he was here?" he growled, getting to the heart of it.

"He's a boob, too," Thorpe told him bluntly. "He told me you knew he had financed my research on the book I tried to sell you. How could you know, unless he told you? He's too damned smart to let a thing like that *slip* out. The shyster sold me out, that's all, and I knew it. And he let me sucker him into getting my kind of release."

"And you think you've got us, eh?" he said carefully.

"Yes, I do, Mr. Faulkner," Thorpe said, the earnestness creeping back into his voice. "Cribb couldn't think beyond your royalties. I began to think, just as you said, that they weren't the real dough. It was *profits* that counted. And this way I hit at the profits."

"Okay," Faulkner conceded wearily. "I'll put you on the payroll, too. Come on over."

"Not that easy," Thorpe protested. "I want—"

"What the devil!" Faulkner blasted, back in character again. "I told you that you had us. Now shut up and get over here. We'll make a deal. Just you and me—no damned lawyers!" The screen went dead.

Thorpe grinned. He took his glasses off and shook them at the blank screen. "You're damned tootin'," he said. "And I get that receptionist with the tin bra for my secretary!"

THE END

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Lost Continents

By L. Sprague de Camp

No. 3

The Land of the Lemurs *

Our fabled shores none ever reach,
No mariner has found our beach,
Scarcely our mirage now is seen,
And neighboring waves of floating green,
Yet still the oldest charts contain
Some dotted outline of our main. . . .
Thoreau

MENTION of Lemuria in the last chapter leads us on one hand to the science of paleogeography—the geography of the earth during past geological ages—and on the other to the occult wing of Atlantism.

The name "Lemuria" originated as follows: After the Darwinian revolution had provided scientists with a solid framework on which to hang the history of the earth and its life, the closing decades of the last century saw a great surge of activity in the fields of biology and geology. Gaps between geological eras were filled, former transgressions of the sea over the land were mapped, and the pedigrees of horses, octopi, and other life-forms were traced.

During the 1860's and 70's a group of British geologists, including Stow and Blanford in India and Griesbach in Africa, noted striking resemblances between certain formations in India and South Africa. William T. Blanford pointed out the similarity between the rocks and fossils of a deposit of the Permian Period in Central India, in a tract called Gondwana, and a corresponding deposit in South Africa. Gondwana, meaning "Land of the Gonds," is named for a forest tribe that ranges the tract and which once had the unpleasant custom of slowly torturing people to death in magical rituals to make their crops grow. The Per-

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mian Period was the last division of the Paleozoic Era, just before the Mesozoic Era or Age of Reptiles: a cold dry mountainous period when the highest forms of life were rather nondescript lizard-like reptiles.

Blanford and his colleagues inferred that South Africa and India were once connected by a land-bridge that included Madagascar with its peculiar mammals, the Aldabra Islands with their giant tortoises, the great Seychelles Reefs (pronounced "*say*-shell"), and the Maldive and Laccadive Islands. These islands and reefs form the tops of an immense submarine mountain-range that winds like a sea-serpent from South Africa to the tip of India.

These observations came to the notice of the Austrian paleontologist Neumayr and the German biologist Haeckel. In his *Erdegeschichte* (1887) Neumayr published the first known attempt at a paleogeographical map of the world, showing how he thought the world looked in Jurassic time, that is, in the middle of the Age of Reptiles. It included a great "Brazilian-Ethiopian Continent" from whose southeast corner extended an "Indo-Madagascan Peninsula" corresponding to Blanford's Permian land-bridge.

Ernst Heinrich Haekel was then performing the same service for science in Germany that Thomas Huxley was doing in England—loud and belligerent advocacy of the revolutionary theories of Darwin. Haeckel seized upon the Indo-Madagascan land-bridge to explain the distribution of lemurs, creatures looking like a cross between a squirrel and a monkey, standing below the true monkeys on our family tree. Lemurs abound in Madagascar, and are also found here and there in Africa, India, and the Malay Archipelago. If, thought Haeckel, the Madagascan land-bridge had endured from the Permian to the Jurassic, why not into the Cenozoic Era or Age of Mammals?

In a burst of exuberance Haeckel went on to suggest that this sunken land might be the original home of man, since the finding of fossil forms intermediate between men and apes had not really begun at this time. (Now over a dozen such forms are known.) Then the English zoölogist Philip L. Sclater suggested the name "Lemuria" for this bridge. The name has stuck, although it now appears that Haeckel was probably wrong about Lemuria's lasting into the Cenozoic, and most paleontologists think they can account for the distribution of lemurs without it.

Other investigators suggested that Lemuria was a remnant of a much larger and earlier continent, which they called Gondwanaland and thought once reached three-quarters of the way around the world in the Southern Hemisphere with a gap in the Pacific. These hypothetical continents, however, have little to do with Atlantism, for even if they existed they broke up long before men evolved. Nevertheless they have been exploited by occultists and Atlantomaniacs for their own purposes.

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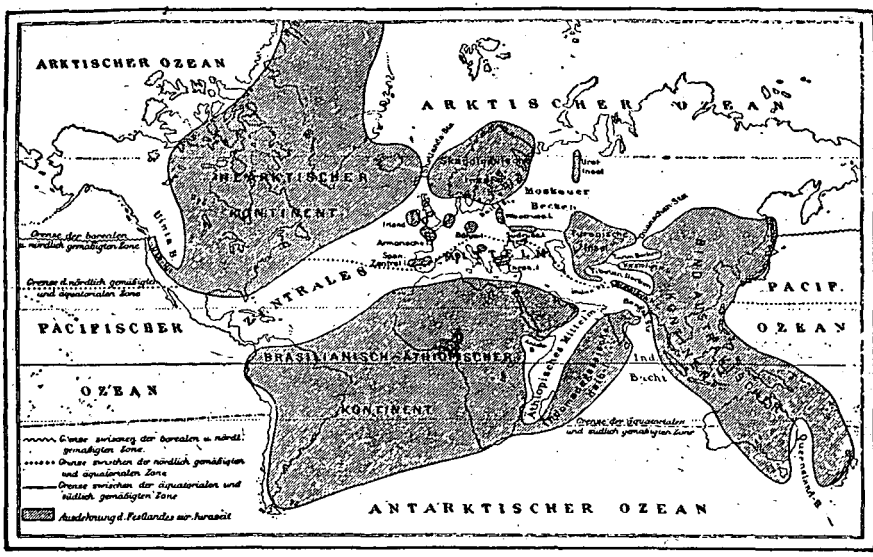

THE FIRST WORLD PALEOGEOGRAPHICAL MAP, from Neumayr's *Erdegeschichte* (1887) showing his hypothetical Brazilo-Ethiopian continent and the Afro-Indian peninsula later called "Lemuria."

THE greatest of modern occultists, the successor of Simon Magus and Cagliostro, was Helena P. Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophy. At the time she entered the current of Atlantism, in the 1870's, she was a fat middle-aged Russian woman living in New York City. She was the estranged wife of a Russian general, and had been successively the mistress of a Slovenian singer, an English businessman, a Russian baron, and a merchant from the Caucasus living in Philadelphia, and had made her living as a circus bareback rider, a professional pianist, a businesswoman, a sweat-shop-worker, and a Spiritualist medium. Altogether she had led a pretty lively career, though in later years she undertook to gild refined gold and paint the lily by inventing an even more remarkable past wherein she was a persecuted virgin who travelled the wide world in search of occult wisdom.

Mme. Blavatsky took as her occult partner Henry Steel Olcott, a shrewd American lawyer who left wife and sons to live with her. Theosophy really got started when the pair moved to India, where Mme. Blavatsky learned to combine her considerable knowledge of Western magic and occultism with a wide and inaccurate smattering of East Indian philosophy and mythology. She led a fascinating

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and turbulent existence, and kept a hold on a sizeable body of followers even after she had been exposed in many chicaneries.

In 1882 she was dazzling a pair of well-connected Anglo-Indian dupes, the newspaper editor Arnold P. Sinnett and the government official Alan Octavian Hume, by delivering letters she said were written by her "Master" Koot Hoomi, but which, as handwriting analysis later showed, she wrote herself. In these letters she was slowly feeling her way to that stunning occult cosmogony that she later advanced, a vast synthesis of Eastern and Western magic and myth about the seven planes of existence, the sevenfold cycles through which everything evolves, the seven Root Races of mankind, the seven bodies that each of us carries with him, and the Brotherhood of Mahatmas who run the world from headquarters in Tibet by sending out streams of occult force and bustling about the world in their astral bodies.

Mme. Blavatsky had picked up the Lemuria theory in the course of her reading and incorporated it, along with Atlantis, into her own gaudy cosmos. She dropped a few hints on these subjects in her Mahatma letters. Subsequently her doctrines took final if wildly confused form in her *chef d'oeuvre, The Secret Doctrine,* which she wrote in Europe after a couple of accomplices who assisted in the production of her thaumaturgic feats betrayed her, forcing her to leave India.

This huge work is supposedly based upon the *Book of Dzyan* (pronounced "John"), of which her Mahatmas showed her a manuscript copy, written on palm-leaf pages, in the trances in which she and they visited one another. The book, we are told, was originally composed in Atlantis in the forgotten Senzar language. *The Secret Doctrine* consists of quotations from the *Dzyan* and Mme. Blavatsky's lengthy commentaries thereon, interspersed with passages of occult gibberish and diatribes against "materialistic" science and "dogmatic" religion. The *Stanzas of Dzyan* begin:

> "1. The Eternal Parent, wrapped in her Ever-invisible Robes, had slumbered once again for Seven Eternities.
>
> "2. Time was not, for it lay asleep in the Infinite Bosom of Duration.
>
> "3. Universal Mind was not, for there were no Ah-hi to contain it.
>
> "4. The Seven Ways of Bliss were not . . ."

Presently the Universe begins to awaken: "The last Vibration of the Seventh Eternity thrills through Infinitude. The Mother swells, expanding from without, like the Bud of the Lotus. . . ."

After various cosmic events, described in this opaquely iridescent language, life appears on earth: "After great throes she cast off her old Three and put on her new Seven

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Skins, and stood in her first one." (The earth seems to be conceived as a sort of cosmic stripteuse.) "The Wheel whirled for thirty crores more. It constructed Rûpas; soft Stones that hardened, hard Plants that softened. Visible from invisible, Insects and small Lives. . . . The Watermen, terrible and bad, she herself created from the remains of others. . . . The great Chohans called the Lords of the Moon, of the Airy Bodies: 'Bring forth Men, Men of your nature. . . .' Animals with bones, dragons of the deep, flying Sarpas were added to the creeping things. . . ."

Without going into the elaborate Theosophical world-plan of multiple planes of existence, chains of planets following each other from plane to plane like the horses on a carousel, and other vagaries, we are told that the history of the earth runs thus: Life evolves through seven cycles or "Rounds," during which mankind develops through seven Root Races, each comprising seven sub-races. The First Root Race, a kind of astral jellyfish, lived on an Imperishable Sacred Land. The Second, a little more substantial dwelt in the former arctic continent of Hyperborea. The Third were the apelike hermaphroditic egg-laying Lemurians, some with four arms and some with an eye in the back of their heads, whose downfall was caused by their discovery of sex. (Mme. Blavatsky took a poor view of sex, at least after she got too old to enjoy it herself.) The Fourth Root Race were the quite human Atlanteans. We are the Fifth, and the Sixth will soon appear.

Hyperborea, like Atlantis, is derived from ancient Greek geographical speculations. The Hyperboreans were supposed to live in the Far North, either on an island or on the mainland of Europe or Asia. The usual locale was the northern coast of Asia, behind the imaginary Riphaean Mountains. Never having been there, the Greeks imagined that the Arctic was a fine place with a balmy climate, where men lived a thousand years:

On every side are the dances of maidens and sounds of the lyre
Circling forever, and notes of the flute; as they revel in gladness,
Crowned is their hair with the bay-leaves of gold; and no sickness afflicts these,
Fortunate people, or age always hateful. . . .

SO far as is known no Greek had ever visited the Far North until in Plato's time the city of Massalia (our Marseilles) sent Pytheas to scout Northern Europe to see where their trade-goods were coming from. Pytheas coasted as far as the mouth of the Rhine, saw Britain, and heard of an island far to the north called Thulë. This was probably the Shetlands or Orkneys, though some have argued for Norway or Iceland. Beyond Thulë, he was told, one could not go, for there the land, sea, and air no longer existed as separate elements, but were mixed together in a

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kind of cosmic pudding, with the consistency of a jellyfish. Perhaps somebody had merely been giving the intrepid Massiliot a hyperbolic description of an arctic fog: "so thick you could cut it with a knife!"

Hyperboreans, it was said, worshipped Apollo, and a wizard-priest named Abaris worshipped so well that the god in gratitude gave him a golden javelin on which he flew about the earth as on a witch's broomstick. He visited Greece where he stopped a plague at Sparta by his magic, then went on to Italy where he studied occultism under Pythagoras before returning to Hyperborea.

But to return to the mysterious Madame and her book: *The Secret Doctrine,* I grieve to say, is neither so ancient, so erudite, nor so authentic as it pretends to be. For when it appeared, the learned but humorless old William Emmette Coleman, outraged by Madam Blavatsky's pretensions to Oriental learning, undertook a complete exegesis of her works. He showed that her main sources were H. H. Wilson's translation of the *Visnu Purana;* Alexander Winchell's *World Life, or, Comparative Geology;* Donnelly's *Atlantis;* and other contemporary scientific and occult works, plagiarized without credit and used in a blundering manner that showed but skin-deep acquaintance with the subjects under discussion. She cribbed at least part of her *Stanzas of Dzyan* from the *Hymn of Creation* in the old Sanskrit *Rig-Veda,* as a comparison of the two compositions will readily show. Coleman promised a book that should expose all of H.P.B.'s sources, including that of the word *Dzyan.* Unfortunately Coleman lost his library and notes in the San Francisco earthquake and died three years later, his book unwritten.

Madame Blavatsky's lost-continent doctrines seem to be based largely on the works of Donnelly, Harris, and Jacolliot. Her contemporary Thomas Lake Harris was a poet, ex-Universalist preacher, and associate of the early Spiritualist leader Andrew Jackson Davis about the middle of the century. Harris soon split with Davis and set up his own cult, first in Chautauqua County, New York, and later in California. His cult had a lurid history, for Harris (like the notorious Purnell of the House of David) denied sex to his followers but enjoyed it himself.

Harris's voluminous writings, like those of H.P.B., comprised a synthesis of the occultisms of India and the West, with multiple planes of existence, a fantastic account of life on other worlds and in the many heavens and hells surrounding these worlds, the sex-life of angels, and interviews with distinguished dead persons like Galileo. The earth, it seems, is the only planet where moral evil exists. There once was another, Ariana, but God impatiently shattered it into meteors. The human race has gone through a succession of Golden, Silver, and Copper Ages, in the course of which it was guided for a time by Adepts from Venus. Evil, especially the sorceries prac-

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ticed in Atlantis, finally brought on a series of catastrophes which submerged Atlantis and other places, and which are remembered as the Biblical Flood.

H. P. B.'s other Atlantis source, the prolific but unreliable French writer Louis Jacolliot (1837-1890) made a collection of Sanskrit myths during a sojourn in India and popularized these in his books when he got back to France. According to him the Hindu classics tell of a former continent called Rutas in the Indian Ocean, which sank beneath the waters. Jacolliot interpreted these myths as referring to a former *Pacific* continent, embracing all the Polynesian islands, where civilization began and of whose submergence Plato's Atlantis story is but an "echo." When Rutas sank, other lands like India rose from the sea.

LATER Theosophical writers like Sinnett and Madame Blavatsky's successor Annie Besant (rhymes with "pleasant") clothed H. P. B.'s somewhat skeletal account of lost continents with a substantial body of detail. They tell, however, a story quite different from that of Plato, altogether ignoring his paleo-Athens and its war with Atlantis.

Thus the English Theosophist W. Scott-Elliot claimed to have received the following revelation from the Theosophical Masters by "astral clairvoyance": The men of the First Root Race, living in the polar "Sacred Land" or Polarea, had astral bodies only, and therefore would be invisible to us. If our clairvoyant powers enabled us to see them at all they would look like gigantic egg-shaped phantoms. They reproduced by fission like amebas.

While the men of the Second Root Race had physical bodies, as these were made of ether they, too, would be invisible to all but trained occultists. They lived in the great northern continent of Hyperborea, of which Greenland, Iceland, and the northern extremities of Europe and Sibera are remnants. These geographical details are colorfully illustrated by the maps which Scott-Elliot copied from occult records and which are tucked into pockets in the covers of his books.

In due course Hyperborea "broke up" and the equally great southern continent of Lemuria took form. Lemuria flourished in the Mesozoic Era and hence was infested by dinosaurs and other dangerous reptiles. Pterosaurs flew through the air on leathery wings; ichthyosaurs and plesiosaurs swarm the marshes.

When the Manu, one of the supernatural supervisors of the Theosophical universe, decided to bring human evolution a step further forward, he took as his model the ape-like creatures that had already evolved on other planets. The Manu's first attempt resulted in jelly-like things with soft bones who could not stand up, but in time the structure of their bodies hardened. These primitive and dim-witted Lemurians were hardly more attractive than the reptiles with which they shared the earth.

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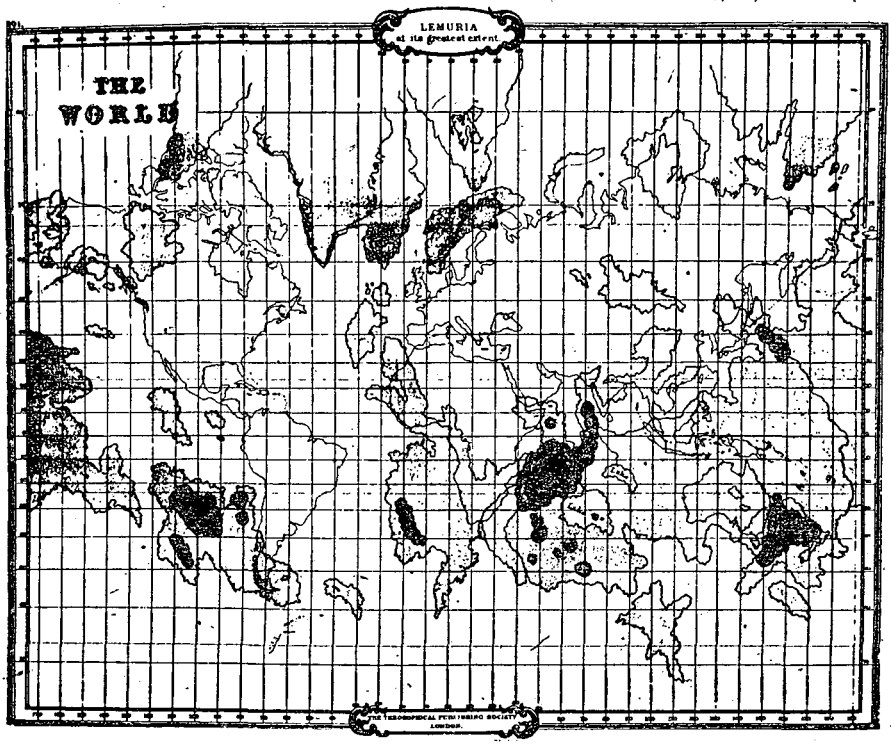

THE THEOSOPHICAL LEMURIA at its greatest extent, according to Scott-Elliot. Lemuria occupies much of the southern hemisphere with an extension into the North Pacific. Dark splotches represent mountainous areas. Remnants of Hyperborea appear in the extreme North

From some unnamed source the author quotes a description of a Lemurian: He was between twelve and fifteen feet tall with a brown skin, a flat face with a protruding muzzle, and small eyes set so wide apart that he could see sideways as well as forward. He had no forehead, but was furnished with a third eye in back, which among us is still represented by the pineal gland in the brain. His long limbs could not be completely straightened, and he had huge hands and feet, the heels of which stuck out so far to the rear that he could walk equally well backward and forward. He wore a loose robe of reptile skin, carried a wooden spear, and led a pet plesiosaur on a leash.

By a strange coincidence, within the last decade scientists have found in southeastern Asia the bones and

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teeth of enormous early-Pleistocene ape-men, *Gigantanthropus* and *Meganthropus*, of whom the largest specimens seem to have been bigger than a full-grown 500-pound gorilla. These monsters match the Theosophical Lemurians in size if not in much else. Of course this does not prove that the Theosophists knew what they were talking about, any more than Plato's mention of the "Outer Continent" shows that he knew of America. It is perfectly possible to hit upon a scientific fact by pure chance, though random guesswork is not recommended as a method of scientific research.

While originally egg-laying hermaphrodites, the Lemurians began to learn about sex during the period of their Fourth Sub-Race, and by their Fifth Sub-Race were reproducing their kind as we do. Being stupid things, they interbred with beasts, the products of this perverted union being the great apes. This sin so revolted the Lhas, the supernatural beings who according to the cosmic plan were supposed at this stage to incarnate in human bodies, that the Lhas refused to do their duty.

Accordingly other beings, from Venus which had already developed a high civilization, volunteered to take the Lhas' place. These "Lords of the Flame" guided faltering humankind to the point where the Lemurians became capable of individual immortality and reincarnation. The Venerians also taught the Lemurians the arts of keeping fire, metallurgy, weaving, and agriculture. By the time the Lemurians reached their Seventh Sub-Race they looked fairly human. Their descendants on earth today are such primitive peoples as the Lapps, the Australian aborigines, and the Andaman Islanders. Their language is the direct progenitor of Chinese, albeit the Chinese *people* are descended from the much later Turanian race.

Towards the end of the Mesozoic Era, Lemuria, like Hyperborea before it, began to break up by the sinking of its various parts, while the peninsula that curved into the North Atlantic grew into Atlantis. At the same time the Fourth Root Race, the Atlantean, appeared. The first Sub-Race of this Root Race, the Rmoahals, moved from the remnants of Lemuria to Atlantis, though some of them stayed behind and interbred with the surviving Lemurians, the resulting half-breeds looking like American Indians with blue skins.

The first Rmoahals, black-skinned men ten or twelve feet tall, settled on the southern coast of Atlantis and fought endless wars with the Sixth and Seventh Sub-Races of the Lemurians. Organized warfare was invented at this time, though the Lemurians had previously indulged in desultory raiding and murder. With the passage of ages the Rmoahals grew shorter; some migrated to northern Atlantis where their skins became lighter, though they were twice driven back to the tropics by glacial advances. The Crô-Magnons, a stalwart race from Europe's Old Stone Age, were their direct descen-

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dants. It seems there is a minor glacial period every 30,000 years and a major glacial period every 3,000,000; one of the latter came on during the Rmoahal period.

The next Sub-Race, the Tlavatlis, were a hardly reddish-brown people, not quite so tall as the Rmoahals, who originated in an island off the west coast of Atlantis, where Mexico is now. These migrated to the mountainous region of Atlantis whence they eventually spread out over the continent and dispossessed the Rmoahals. Whereas the bestial Lemurians and the childish Rmoahals where incapable of self-government, the Tlavatlis had attained the point of choosing chiefs or kings by acclamation.

The next Sub-Race, the Toltecs, ushered in the great period of Atlantean glory, in the early part of the Age of Mammals. They were redskins, a mere eight feet tall and handsome. (Mrs. Besant, who liked to go Scott-Elliot one better, made them twenty-seven feet tall with bodies of rock-hard consistency). They discovered the principle of hereditary monarchy, and for thousands of years their kings ruled them wisely because they kept in touch with the supernatural Adepts, as the legendary Roman king Numa Pompilius is supposed to have obtained advice from the nymph Egeria.

Unhappily the Toltecs degenerated after 100,000 years of this splendid culture. They resorted to sorcery and phallic worship and used their great psychic powers for personal aggrandizement. "No longer submitting to the wise rule of the Initiate emperors, the followers of the 'black arts' rose in rebellion and set up a rival emperor, who after much struggle and fighting drove the white emperor from his capital, the 'City of the Golden Gates,' and established himself on his throne." The white emperor took refuge with a tributary king, while dynasties of sorcerers like the "demon king" Thevatat created and worshipped elemental spirits with bloody rites.

At this time the next Sub-Race, the Turanians, appeared and fought with the Toltecs. The newcomers were a lawless, turbulent, cruel, and brutal lot, ruthless and irresponsible individualists who to increase their population for warfare practiced complete sexual promiscuity. Their descendants, the Aztecs, carried on their tradition of cruelty. At this time also, about 800,000 years ago, a catastrophe caused much of Atlantis, including the part ruled by the sorcerers, to sink beneath the ocean, reducing it from a real continent to a large island, while islands increased in size on their way to becoming the present continents, Asia and the rest. The Turanians migrated to Asia, where on the plains of Tatary they gave rise to the more civilized and psychically gifted Mongolians, the Seventh Sub-Race. Just how these races started is left vague.

The Fifth and Sixth Sub-Races, the Semites and Akkadians, also came into being now. The former, who originated in the northern At-

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lantean peninsulas that now comprise Ireland and Scotland, were a discontented, quarrelsome, energetic folk living under a patriarchal social scheme and constantly raiding their neighbors, especially the law abiding Akkadians. After another catastrophe, 200,000 years ago, reduced Atlantis to two Atlantic islands, big northern Ruta and small southern Daitya, a dynasty of Semite sorcerers ruled the City of the Golden Gates in Daitya while Toltec sorcerers reigned in Ruta.

About 100,000 years ago the Akkadians drove the Semites from Atlantis. The Akkadians, enterprising colonizers with strong legal and commercial instincts, also settled the Levant; the Basques represent them today. Then another subsidence 80,000 years ago submerged Daitya and reduced Ruta to about the size of France and Spain combined. It was this island, properly called Poseidonis, of whose final submergence Plato wrote. Banning, another occult Atlantist, tells us that when Poseidonis sank in 9564 B.C., the world assumed its present shape, but not permanently, for one of these days the continent of the next Root Race (which Banning calls by the repellant name of "Numerica") will rise from the Pacific. Then in the remote future still another continent ("Nu-lantis") will appear, comprising the South Atlantic Ocean and parts of the adjacent continents.

Before each of these catastrophes the initiate priests, warned by occult means, would lead a migration of the worthier sections of their people to new lands. Thus it came to pass that before the subsidence of 200,000 years ago, the Occult Lodge founded the Divine Dynasty in Egypt and built the two great pyramids at Gizeh, which later generations mistakenly attributed to Kings Khufu and Khafra of historic times. Subsequently Egypt was flooded during the submergence of Daitya, but the people, forewarned, had fled to Ethiopia whence they repopulated their land when the water subsided. Their records were also preserved, having been stored in the pyramids. The dunking of Poseidonis sent another earthquake wave over Egypt, ending the Divine Dynasty, but Egypt nonetheless recovered.

The Manu, seeing in the intellectual powers of the Semites the best future prospects for human development, led a chosen band of these folk to Central Asia where they evolved into the Aryans—the Fifth Root Race who include the modern Hindus and Europeans. Scott-Elliot drops only a dark hint about the place of the Jews in this Semite-Aryan scheme, to the effect that they "constitute an abnormal and unnatural link between the Fourth and Fifth Root Races." The tale of migrations and intermixtures out of which came the modern racial makeup of mankind is set forth in such detail as to be impractical for us to try to follow out.

Scott-Elliot goes on to describe life in Atlantis. Under the Toltec emperors the Atlanteans were subject to

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a collectivistic despotism like that of the Inca Empire of Peru—which indeed was derived from Atlantis. The emperor owned everything, and ruled through a squad of viceroys, under whose guidance the peasantry practiced agriculture. The viceroys collected each crop, set aside a part for the government and another for the priesthood, and divided the rest among the masses. The system worked so well that Atlantis knew no poverty until in the days of decadence the ruling class became selfish and oppressive and the system broke down.

The Atlanteans raised wheat, brought from another planet by a Manu, and other grains such as oats, which were crosses between wheat and earthly plants. The greatest feat of Atlantean agronomists was the creation of the banana. They domesticated animals resembling the modern tapir, leopard, llama, and wolf, and for meat and leather kept herds of half-wild Irish elk in parks. They ate vegetables, bread, milk, meat, and fish. They showed peculiar taste with regard to the last two items, preferring their fish rotten and what are to us the less palatable organs for meat. They also drank blood. However, the kings and priests, being true initiates, were vegetarians. Drunkenness once became so common that they adopted prohibition.

The Atlanteans practiced equality of the sexes, though bigamy was allowed and sometimes practiced. Their education was highly organized, but higher education was furnished the élite only. The masses were not even taught to read and write, but were confined to vocational training. The élite wrote on metal sheets and duplicated their writing by a process like mimeographing. As artists they were indifferent painters, fond of garish colors, but good sculptors and superb architects who built gigantic structures. A Toltec house always had an astronomical observatory attached. There were no shops, since all buying and selling was done in private houses.

Their sciences were highly developed. Alchemists made precious metals in any quantity wanted; astrologers advised the viceroys on forthcoming weather conditions to enable the latter to plan farming operations. In war they fought with swords, spears, bows, and gas-bombs thrown from catapults. Their aircraft were boat-shaped structures made of plywood and light alloys, and propelled by jets of the *vril*-force invented by the Victorian novelist Bulwer-Lytton in his short novel, *The Coming Race*, wherein a race of underground supermen use this invincible and mentally directed force to blast rocks and monsters. These aircraft had a ceiling of 1000 feet (the air being less dense than it now is) and a maximum speed of 100 m.p.h. Only the rich possessed private aircraft. The emperor had a fleet of aërial warships carrying 50 to 100 men each, whose method of fighting was to play their jets on one another until one upset the other and rammed it while it was helpless. They also sailed the seas in ships

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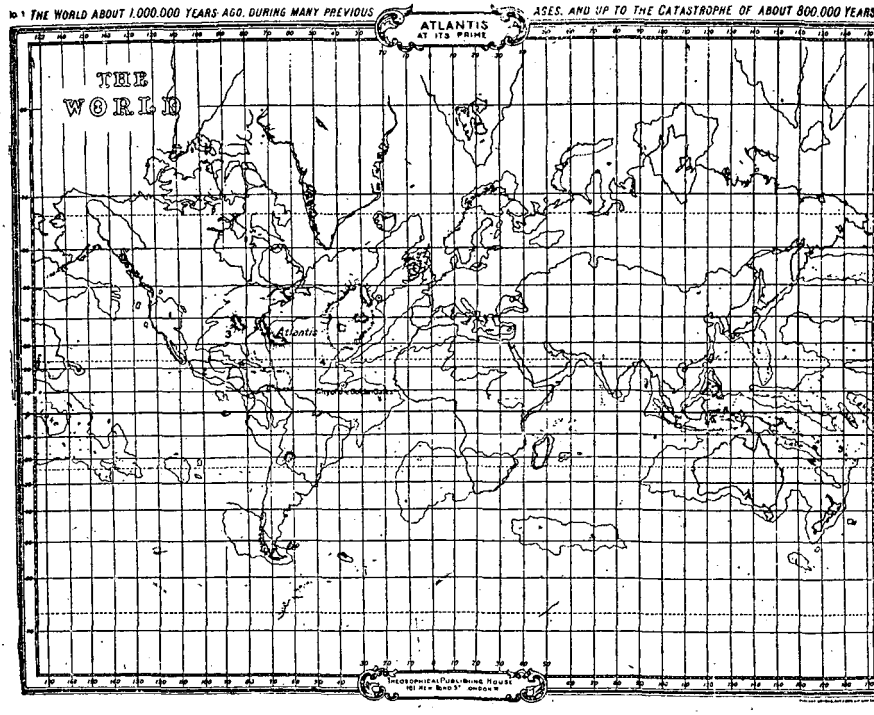
propelled by a similar force.

Atlantean religion alternated between worship of the Manu and sun-worship, descending in degenerate times to diabolism and the worship of statues of themselves by rich men. The City of the Golden Gates resembled Plato's city of Atlantis, with the addition of waterworks, a guest-house where strangers were boarded free, and a population of two million.

Altogether life in the Theosophical Atlantis resembles nothing so much as life on Mars as pictured in the Martian novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs.

The schismatic Theosophical leader Rudolf Steiner added details about the psychology of the Lemurians and Atlanteans in his *Lemuria and Atlantis*. Steiner, a tall bellowing Austrian with a fine collection of university degrees, was a power in European Theosophy until in 1907 he broke with the parent organization over the issue of Mrs. Besant's deification of the young Hindu Krishnamurti. He seceded with 2400 fol-


THE WORLD ABOUT 1,000,000 YEARS AGO, DURING MANY PREVIOUS
ATLANTIS AT ITS PRIME
ASES, AND UP TO THE CATASTROPHE OF ABOUT 800,000 YEARS
THE WORLD
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THE THEOSOPHICAL ATLANTIS in its prime, according to Scott-Elliot. Atlantis occupies most of the Atlantic Ocean; Lemuria takes in southern Asia, Australia, and adjacent regions.

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lowers and formed a new cult, the Anthroposophical Society, with headquarters at Dornach, Switzerland, where he reigned until his death in 1925.

The Lemurians, according to Steiner, possessed such feeble mental powers that while they could visualize things, they could neither remember their mental images nor use them for rational thought. They therefore had to get along on "instinct" or "indwelling spiritual force." Still, they had more control over nature than we have because of their great development of will-power, by which they could even lift great weights. Lemurian education aimed at increasing this will-power by training young Lemurians to bear pain.

Along with individual souls, the Lemurians developed the rudiments of speech towards the end of their racial history. Before they became divided into two sexes they had but little sense of sight; for a while they managed with a single eye. As long as the soul dominated the body, the soul being neuter, the body was also sexless, but at last the increasing density of matter forced sex to develop. Even so, for a long time after this interesting innovation, sexual intercourse was looked upon not as a pleasure but as a sacred duty. Lemurian women, being more spiritual than the men and much given to mystic trances, were the first to develop a sense of right and wrong.

The Atlanteans likewise could not reason or calculate, but they had the advantage over their predecessors of possessing fine memories for mental images. Atlantean education, in fact, consisted chiefly of training the memory to hold images, so that an adult Atlantean had a vast store of them available and when confronted with a problem solved it by remembering a precedent. When facing a novel situation, however, he had either to experiment blindly or to give up. Under these conditions the Atlanteans were far from progressive.

The Atlanteans were masters of the "life force" of growing things, such as a grain of wheat, and by this force they operated their aircraft, for instance. They also (especially the Rmoahals) grasped the magical power of words and used the occult energies of these words to accomplish work on the material plane. For example words could heal wounds or tame wild beasts. The Atlantean was more "natural" and instinctive in his powers and conduct than we are; he had absolute control over his physical forces, and his towns grew according to natural laws like an organism. The Toltecs achieved the power of conferring upon their descendants their individual collections of "life-pictures," thus furnishing the latter with ready-made equipment to guide their actions throughout life.

When the Semites appeared, men were losing control over the life-force and selfish individualism had become rampant. The Semites accordingly developed the power of reasoning as a counter to these changes, and along with reason a conscience. Their des-

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cendants the Aryans developed these faculties still further.

SINCE the time of Helena Blavatsky, Atlantis and other lost continents have become standard fixtures in bodies of Western occult doctrine. Similar syntheses of Eastern and Western occultism, complete with Atlantis, Lemuria, an eight-dimensional universe, reincarnation, pyramidology, and the like have been proffered by the learned contemporary occultist Manly P. Hall and by the late hillbilly clairvoyant-diagnostician Edgar Cayce (pronounced "Casey"). While an American physician-turned-occultist, W. P. Phelon, enrolled people in his Hermetic Brotherhood of Atlantis, Luxor, and Elephante (into which he said he had been inducted by initiates in Egypt) the notorious English wizard Aleister Crowley (rhymes with "holy"), who liked to be known as "the wickedest man in the world," included a society of Atlantean Adepts among his many gudgeon-traps.

To continue, R. Swinburne Clymer, who published the second edition of Phelon's book and who runs a Rosicrucian Foundation in Pennsylvania rivalling the better-known AMORC, assures the readers of his own voluminous works that his society preserves the original, authentic Atlantean fire-worship of which all modern creeds and sects are but corrupted descendants. According to Clymer, the Atlanteans' downfall occurred when, becoming overconfident as a result of their scientific and magical accomplishments, they tried to visit God uninvited. This rash act, by upsetting the balance of natural forces, caused the sinking of the continent. Remnants of the Atlanteans, nevertheless, still preserve the ancient wisdom in their hideouts in Yucatán.

Atlantis has, of course been contacted through the spirit world, though there is little consistency among the widely varving accounts of Atlantean language and culture obtained from this source—in fact, about as little as among mediumistic accounts of the spirit world itself. In the early years of this century J. B. Leslie interviewed Atlantean ghosts through a Spiritualist medium and published the information thus obtained in a huge 805-page book that included tables of Atlantean letters, numbers, and musical notations, and there have been other revelations of this sort as well.

MEANWHILE, other occultists moved Lemuria from the Indian Ocean (where Mme. Blavatsky at least had the grace to leave it) several thousand miles to the Central Pacific, where Jacolliot had located his lost land of Rutas.

Another contemporary of H. P. B., John Ballou Newbrough, after a successful career as a gold-miner, physician, dentist, and Spiritualist medium, wrote an *ersatz* Bible called *Oahspe*. This book is full of such extraordinary misinformation as that Thoth founded the Muhammedan re-

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ligion, and unfulfilled prophecies to the effect that all men would soon leave their present religions to join Newbrough's pacifistic, vegetarian Jehovists. Newbrough claimed that the book was of angelic origin and that he wrote it by automatic writing.

Oahspe includes a map of the earth in antediluvian times with a large triangular continent called "Pan" filling most of the northern Pacific. The author printed a Panic dictionary and a Panic alphabet, the latter consisting mostly of little circles with patterns and pictures in them. His doctrines are explained in more detail by his follower Wing Anderson, who runs a Kosmon Press in Los Angeles and is on record as having predicted that Franklin Roosevelt would be succeeded by a fascist dictator in 1940, that there would be an American civil war by 1944 and that Hitler would be swept away by domestic revolution before he got around to attacking the United States.

Man, according to Newbrough and Anderson, appeared 72,000 years ago when angels materialized on earth and interbred with a species of seal-like animals, the A'su, to beget the I'hins. These in turn crossed with the A'su to produce the Druk, who crossed with the I'hins to engender the Ghans-us. The African and Asiatic peoples are the remnants of the Druks. Anderson gives a table showing the proportion of angelic blood carried by each of these breeds, though he seems to have gotten his fractions mixed up. Pan or Mu disappeared 24,000 years ago, but is soon to rise again from the Pacific, and will be inhabited by the Kosmon race, formed by the amalgamations of all the present races. The Millenium will begin in 1980.

A writer named Frederick Spencer Oliver (not to be confused with Fredrick Scott Oliver the novelist) contributed to the Pacific-Lemuria concept with a tiresome occult novel, *A Dweller on Two Planets* (1894) which he wrote under the name of "Phylos the Tibetan." In this story the narrator tells how he met his Master, a Chinese named Quong on Mount Shasta in Northern California. Quong not only cured the narrator of his anti-Chinese prejudices but also tamed bears and pumas by a word (as St. Francis was supposed to have done with a wolf) and inducted the narrator into an order of sages who preserved the wisdom of the ancients at their Shasta headquarters.

These magi took him on a tour of the planet Venus in his spiritual body, and also taught him to remember his previous incarnations. He thus learned that when he was Zailm Numinos of Atlantis he had risen by hard work and good luck from a poor miner's son to prince of the realm, and had done very well until he got involved with two women at once. The main cities of Atlantis or Poseid were Idosa, Terna, Marzeus, Corosa, Numea, and Caiphul. The land prospered under an elective monarchy, the Rai or emperor being chosen by an aristocracy of priests *(Incala)* and scientists *(Xioqua)*. The

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Atlanteans were of course very scientific, having aircraft *(vailxi)* and television.

This tale influenced Edgar Lucien Larkin, an elderly occultist who for some years before his death in 1924 ran the Mount Lowe Observatory in California—not to be confused with the nearby Mount Wilson Observatory. Whereas the latter is a great scientific institution, the Mount Lowe Observatory was operated as a tourist attraction by the Pacific Electric Railway in connection with their Mount Lowe Inn. Larkin showed visitors the stars through a small telescope until in the 1930's the telescope mechanism broke down and the Inn burned.

Larkin asserted that he had spied upon the Lemurians of Mount Shasta through a telescope, learning that a thousand of them lived in a "mystic village" built around a great Maya-style temple. Occasionally, he said, they appeared in neighboring towns, clad in long white robes, polite but taciturn, to buy supplies (mostly sulphur, salt, and lard) which they paid for with gold nuggets. Every midnight they celebrated their escape from Lemuria with ceremonies that flooded the mountain with red-and-green light. However, they did not welcome visitors, and those who tried to penetrate their retreat either failed to find it or disappeared.

Eight years after Larkin's death, one Edward Lanser made a feature story of the Shasta Lemurians for the *Los Angeles Sunday Times,* wherein Lanser himself claimed to have seen the transcendental fireworks of the Lemurians from a train passing Mount Shasta. A clipping of this story excited the learned Scottish mythologist Lewis Spence to make much of it in his *Problem of Lemuria* . . . but we shall come back to Spence's theories later.

Occultists and pseudo-scientists still exploit the Shasta Lemurians and their nightgowns despite the fact that campers and state forest officials wander freely over Shasta all the time without meeting these interesting people. W. S. Cervé, for instance, credits them with aircraft and English accents. Cervé's book, published by Clymer's enemies the Rosicrucians of San Jose, combines Lemuria and Atlantis with the Jewish-Indian theory and Wegener's hypothesis of continental drift. The Mayas, it seems, were descendants of Atlanteans and Lemurians, whereas all the other Amerinds were derived from the Lost Ten Tribes. Cervé's Lemurians had a bump in the middle of their foreheads—a telepathic organ.

Finally the late Guy Warren Ballard, alias Godfré Ray King, founder of the I AM cult, claimed to have met his personal Master, Saint Germain, on Mount Shasta. Saint Germain seems to be a Mahatma remotely derived from the Comte de Saint-Germain, a slippery eighteenth-century European occultist and industrial promoter. Ballard, who graduated from selling stock in imaginary gold mines to old ladies, into occultism, picked elements of his grotesque mythology from Oliver's book, from

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Theosophy, from Christian Science, from Rosicrucianism, and from the Swamis, and reduced the resulting mishmash to the mental level of those comic-books whose covers show a muscular hero in a ballet-suit tearing a battleship asunder with his bare hands.

Ballard told how his Master showed him the sacred headquarters of the ruling Brotherhood in the Teton Mountains, where he saw their vast hoard of wealth and was shown magical movies of his former lives. He was delighted to learn thus that he was a reincarnation of George Washington and his wife of Joan of Arc. And of course he learned about Atlantis, Lemuria, and other vanished civilizations including one in the Sahara Desert and one (ruled by a king named Casimir Poseidon) in the Amazon River region.

For those who wish to turn Atlantism to practical account, there is or was a Lemurian Fellowship of Milwaukee, which offered correspondence courses in the "Lemurian Cosmo-Conception." The Fellowship, while following Oliver and Churchward in their concept of Lemuria, made a point of Lemuria's having been ruled by an élite minority that qualified for "citizenship" by seven years' study of occultism. The downfall of Lemurian civilization came about when this minority emigrated to China, Yucatán, and Atlantis, leaving the government in the unqualified hands of the proletariat.

Now, however, Lemuria is again rising from the Pacific. The civilization that will come into being there will be of the original Lemurian type. Its "citizens" will at the start be chosen from graduates of the correspondence courses of the Fellowship, which is even now planning the super-cities that will rise on this new continent. So, by joining the Fellowship now, you can get in on the ground floor.

These vagaries illustrate the motives and sources both of Atlantism and of occultism in general—the urge to distinction by some easy, indirect route; the assumptions of the wisdom of the ancients and the hidden hierarchy that rules the earth; the yearning for a real utopia somewhere, some time. And, sometimes, the desire to make a fast dollar. Such doctrines are the product of the occult animus reinforced by a fertile imagination, wide if indiscriminate reading, and disregard of logic, experience, and factual evidence. Not even much imagination is needed, since the volume of occult literature is enormous, even if not familiar to the average reader. One can easily concoct an esoteric doctrine with Atlantist features by lifting sections from the work of his predecessors, as Mme. Blavatsky and Scott-Elliot used Donnelly.

Occult Atlantism shows the double attitude of occultists towards science. On one hand they would like to cut in on the enormous prestige of science, and hence quote whatever scientific or near-scientific dicta they think will support their ideas. They say the Mayas' "structures are scien-

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tifically admitted to be older than those of Egypt," and "the great scientific explorations have revealed that there is such a continent" as a Pacific Lemuria. (Science admits nothing of the sort.) Or they quote people like John W. Keely, a nineteenth-century perpetual-motion crank, as "distinguished scientists," or cite obsolete science, or refer to some authentic scientist who has gone off the deep end in a field wherein he is not expert, as Piazzi Smith did in Egyptology. No matter; followers of cults make no distinction.

On the other hand, since the scientific method destroys occult doctrines, occultists try to meet this difficulty by a frank rejection of the usual standards of knowledge. Material evidence, they say, is worthless; Truth is to be dredged out of the inner consciousness by mystical introspection. These methods are "more scientific than even modern science," whose "great psysiological discoveries" are "no better than cobwebs, spun by her scientific fantasies and illusions," and "little reliance can be placed on such external evidences." On the other hand, occultism is "Gnosis," based upon infallible "Akashic Records," and those who disagree with it are merely "well meaning, but greviously [*sic*] misinformed Individuals who have based their theories upon superficial archeological observation and theological speculation, not upon INHERENT KNOWLEDGE, CLAIRVOYANT VISION, or DIVINE REVELATION."

If you insist upon evidence, there are plenty of records of lost continents, but these are concealed in the Fourth Dimension, or in secret underground libraries in Tibet open to qualified occultists only.

The occulists, in fact, live in that dream-world of early adolescence, where a boy becomes a pirate chief and a girl Marie Antoinette by a pure act of imagination. The romantic settings in which these beings exist are created, complete with colorful if inaccurate detail, by the childhood faculty of conjuring up solid-looking eidetic images. But every private paradise of that sort requires some sacrifice from those who enter; in the case of the imaginary worlds of the occult, the abandonment of reason. And without reason nobody has yet figured a way to find that hair that, perhaps, divides the false and true.

So, if we really want to get to the bottom of the lost-continent problem, we must leave the occultists to their dream-worlds—very pretty, but not for us.

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Editorial

(Concluded from page 5)

the world", are actually trying to forward the cause of "one world" but don't dare say that is their goal? How can a "united" front be anything but a unit?

Just the other day we got a letter from Scotland which we'll quote to illustrate the new thinking we're going through. Peter Hamilton and John Brunner are a couple of those "guys". They are putting out a new magazine called *Nebula Science Fiction.* They are in something of a spot. They say: "Owing to the dollar (and even sterling) shortages, we can't do what we'd like and take a page in every sf zine in the States—all we can do is ask well-disposed persons (such as you) for a casual mention sometime."

Casual mention, he says! Okay, here it is: *"Nebula Science Fiction;* 30c per copy, postage paid; Crownpoint Publications, 159 Crownpoint Road, Glasgow, SE, Scotland."

Welcome to the fold, gentlemen! We know that with writers like William F. Temple, Sydney J. Bounds, F. G. Rayer, Charles Eric Main and many others, you'll have a real good magazine, and we have a strong hunch a lot of OTHER WORLDS readers will be glad of our casual mention.

Reading this over, we feel sure *this* won't be one of those editorials we'll regret later. Maybe *Nebula SF* isn't on the stands of America, but it's there in spirit now. And the spirit's the thing!

Which brings us to a prediction: Science fiction is due to dominate the scene as no type of literature in the popular fashion ever has. It's no longer an imaginative projection of the future, or of "unreality", but a commentary on an actuality. We say this because as we stood before that newsstand, we also invisioned standing there twelve years ago, and thinking of a certain series of back cover articles concerning the "things of 1950." We suddenly realized 1950 was PAST. Not an imaginary tomorrow, but *yesterday.* Isn't that Amazing? Tomorrow is here, real, factual; and as fantastic (or more so) than we had pictured it. The airplane of today makes the imaginary "plane of 1950" look like a limping dodo. The science fiction of today has shoved the Past right out of the picture. The Western is a folk-story, a curio of a by-gone day. It will never be anything else again. *We* are here, gentlemen. Here to stay! The world of Wonder come to life at last. . .

Astounding, isn't it? *Rap.*

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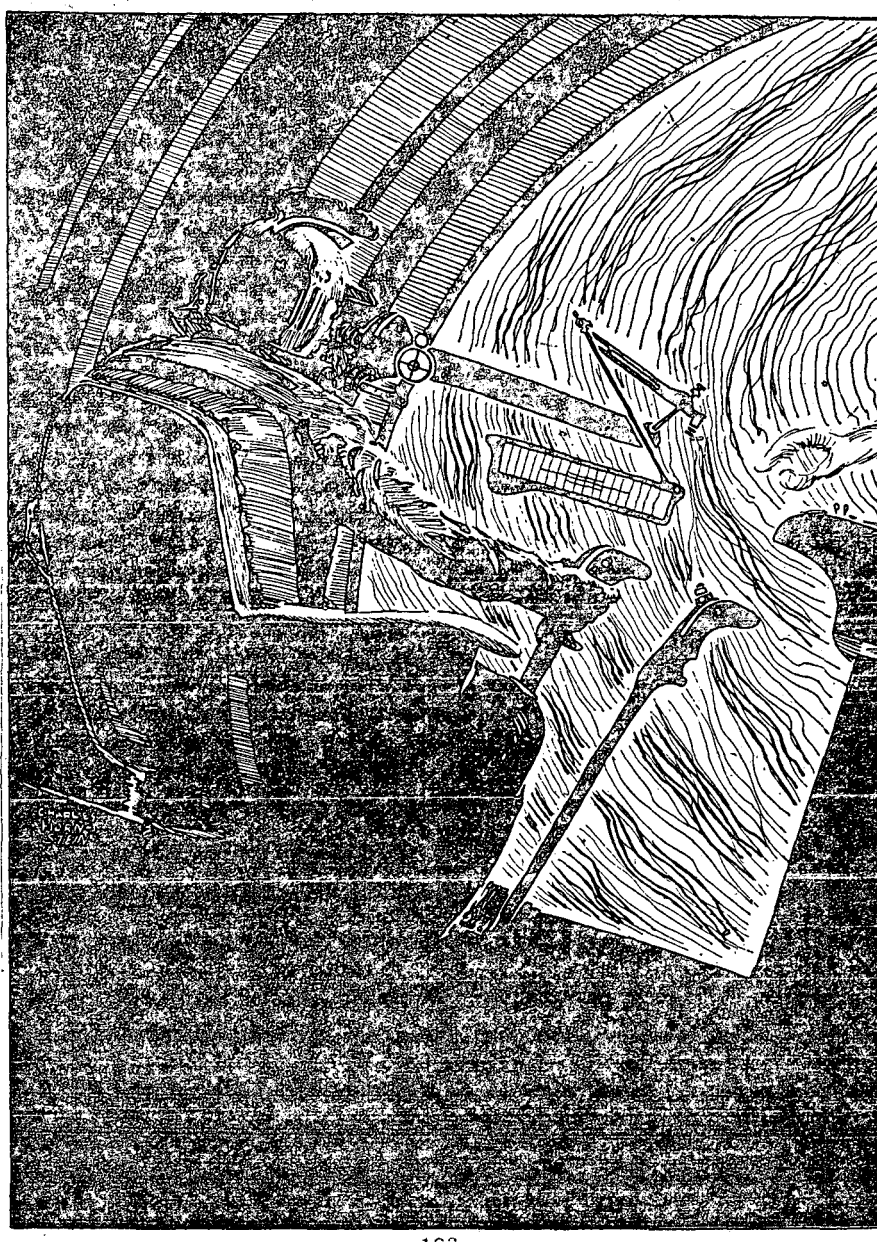

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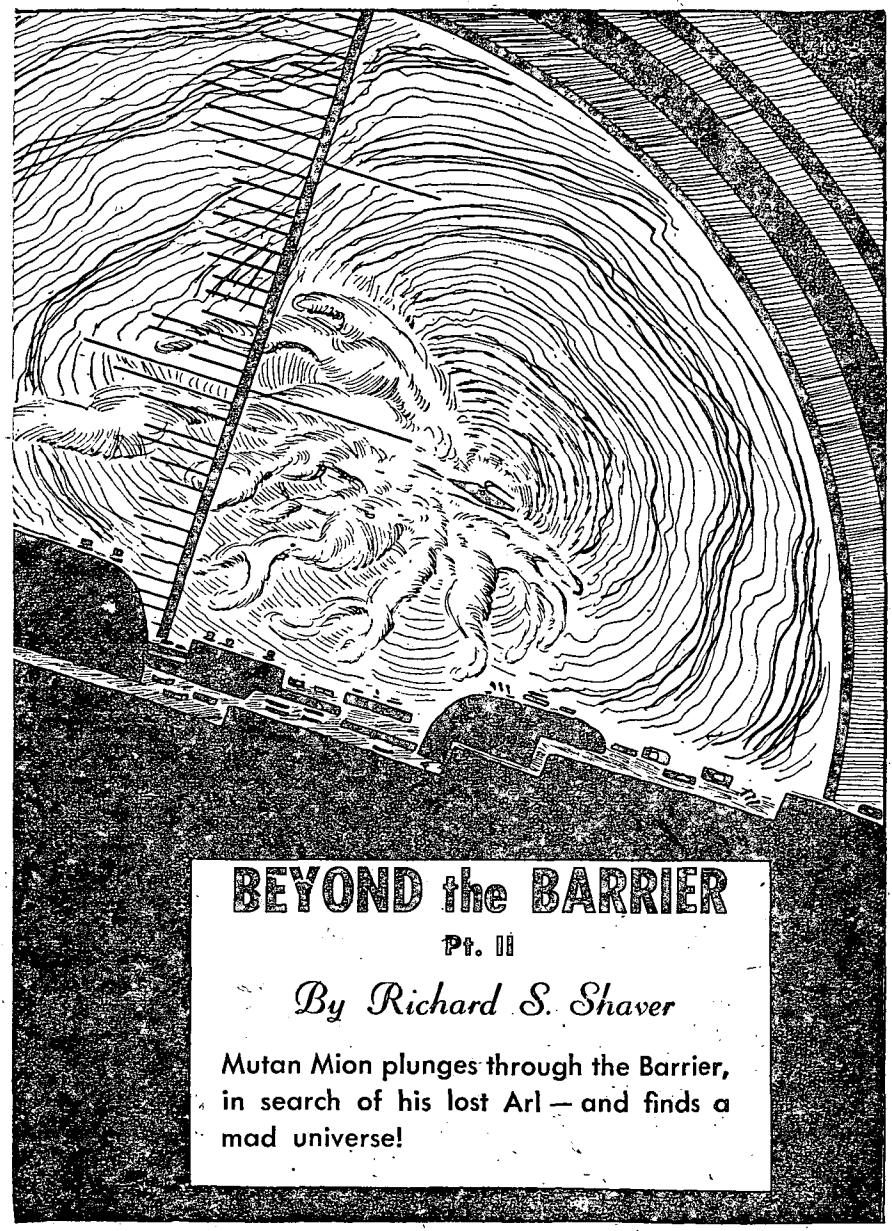

BEYOND the BARRIER

Pt. II

By Richard S. Shaver

Mutan Mion plunges through the Barrier, in search of his lost Arl — and finds a mad universe!

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MANY THOUSANDS of years ago, on the dark world of Nor, ruled over by the goddess, Vanue, lived a one-time Earthman, Mutan Mion, and his variform wife, Arl (she of the bushy tail). Great was their love, so that it was famed over the entire universe. Then one night a kidnapper, invisible even to Vanue's watch-rays, stole Arl away. Stunned by the loss of his love, Mutan Mion grieved and raged by turns, but to no avail. There was no clue to begin a search. Then, from Peira, a world of elfin women, an egg-laying race, created ages agone by the variform scientists for the pleasure of the ancients, came both a clue and a plea. The kidnappers of Arl were a race from beyond the Barrier, which was a strange area of incredibly intense gravity in space that walled off access to a whole new universe. The Peirae had also found a way through the Barrier, but needed a warrior-champion to lead them to a new life of freedom beyond the dictates of the Council which had doomed them to eternal lovelessness and manlessness. To Vanue they came, seeking Mutan Mion for their champion.

Accepting the task, Mutan and his warrior comrade, Tyron, accompanied by their faithful crew, boarded the Darkome *and traveled to Peira with Elyse, their ambassadress guide. There they met Averna, the Elder Oracle and ruler of Peira, and Saphele, the warrior-maid who had discovered the way through the Barrier—a small planet whose orbit carried it into both universes. Only at its center, at the bottom of a shaft to its heart, where the tremendous gravity that would otherwise crush all matter to incredible compactness is nullified, could the passage of the Barrier be made.*

At a welcoming banquet, Mutan Mion discovered that his mission was two-fold. Averna expected him to become the father of the new race of Peirans, and to aid in the conversion from egg-layers to the normal human method of reproduction; to a race of divided sexes, as they once were before the now-forbidden variform technique had made them into creatures independent of man. Angrily Mutan refused, but promised to allow his decision to remain in the future, depending on his success in his search for Arl, and in his conquest of a new world for them in the universe beyond the Barrier.

A fleet was outfitted, and the Darkome *led the way to the Barrier-penetrating planet. Then, descending the shaft to its center, the* Darkome *became wedged, trapped, and at the mercy of an enemy ship now seen below, training its rays upon them. The* Darkome *seemed helpless, with only one ray capable of being trained downward.*

Now go on with the story:

* * *

STARING down the shaft was like peering down the bore of a huge cannon. The lights of the enemy craft at the bottom were but tiny points of deadly menace. Mutan Mion sweat drops of blood. If those unknown creatures in that ship below

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became aware the *Darkome* was stuck fast between the adamantine walls of the shaft, it meant their end.

A queer shimmering shaft of light sprang suddenly from the distant ship, but it did not act like any ray he knew. It clung to the sides of the shaft, sweeping up toward the *Darkome* like water flowing uphill, shimmering and flowing slowly. That it was some type of weapon he did not doubt.

Mion switched on his defensive force-screens and reached out with a beam of black *shorter* and touched the strange force. Before it reached the ship it seemed to lose itself in the rock, gradually diminishing and finally disappearing. Seeing that he could stop the beam, Mion ordered the crew out in space suits, but told them to keep the bulge of the ship between them and the raider below.

Mion at first did not fire on the strangers, hoping they too might desist, at least until the *Darkome* was freed. But the ship poked its nose up the shaft, and Mion saw that they meant to close the distance in order to use their strange weapon more effectively. He lined up the one big ray in the bow of the motionless *Darkome* and loosed a heavy charge of disociator ray. The effect was startling. The matter dissolver turned the whole bow of the strange ship into its component atoms, left a cloud of shimmering dust through which the whole after part of the ship lay exposed, chamber on chamber. The enemy had no defensive ray screens!

Mion bellowed with triumph as the strange-bodied aliens leaped out of the ship. Like shapeless sacks, floating in the weightless area about the core, they drifted about the cross-sectioned ship, and made their way by kicks and jerks toward the rear of their suddenly helpless vessel. Mion did not fire again. Something about the weird shape of these creatures held his hand. He hoped they would not attempt further hostilities, for he did not want to kill anything so strange until he knew more about them.

After some thirty minutes of persistent work with the short-focus discutters designed for rock melting—or for weapons in case of need—the crew freed the *Darkome* and filed back aboard. Tyron came back to the controls and began to let the *Darkome* gently down the shaft. Mion switched on the inter-ship telaug beams and reported to the waiting Peiran craft all that had occurred. Since the time needed for them all to get down the shaft safely, was already cut very short he ordered all craft to enter the shaft at once, while he cleared the bottom of all danger.

But as he reached the position where the wrecked raider's ship lay and nosed it aside so that it floated off into the horizontal bore at the bottom, he realized he now had no way of distinguishing the raiders still intact and those other ancient craft Saphele had told him lay about the huge borings at the bottom.

Aboard the *Darkome* were not only the Elder Oracle, Averna, but Saphele and Elyse, as well as a score of other

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Peiran luminaries and scientists. Saphele, reading his thought, and knowing he would never ask her to go, volunteered.

"I have been there before. I can recognize which are the abandoned ships and which are newcome. It could be no one but me, Lord. I will be back at once if all is well. If I do not return in less than an hour, you will know there is an enemy present and that I have been caught or cannot move from hiding. What will you do then?"

"I'll come on down and shoot anything that moves, so don't move, little one!"

There was some air down here, but they knew without testing that the air was worthless, because the whole surface of the planet was one dark smoothness. There could be no good air where there was no plant life. Saphele slipped on her helmet, stepped through the air lock. They waited, the ship grinding slowly against the walls with a sound that must echo thunderously in that narrow shaft.

Saphele was back in less than a half-hour, but the time had seemed endless. "Two raiders! Getting ready to enter the shaft. You can take them as they enter, or you can drop down on them. They're right beside the shaft in the biggest bore."

There was a gunner at every ray, the ports were open, and every one aboard was strapped in their seats. Tyron took over the controls, while Mion swiveled the bow ray back and forth. The finder ray, an infra-red that gave a clear image on the sighting screen, showed only the black emptiness below. Tyron dropped the huge ship steadily downward.

Quite abruptly the nose of another ship entering the shaft showed on the screen. Mion pressed the firing lever without thought, an automatic reaction. The ray struck the queer nose of the strange ship, divided it down the center. A foot wide swath of metal turned suddenly to dust; the nose of the ship dropped off. Revealed within were chambers and compartments, and creatures falling out as the ship shuddered, veered, ground against the wall of the shaft and came to a stop.

"What do you call those?" bellowed Tyron, his mouth hanging open in astonishment.

Mion said nothing, his invisible sighting ray swinging right and left, up and down, as he watched for the other raider to appear behind the first.

"Take her down so I can get a shot at the other before they get set," he called to Tyron. "Never mind what they look like—you won't be caring about that if they get a beam into us!"

Tyron dropped the ship steadily. The nose of the *Darkome* touched the shattered nose sheared from the other ship, pushed it lightly aside, rolled it thunderously across the deeper bore of the tunnel at right angles to the shaft. The bulk of the rest of the ship was lying against the side of the shaft. Tyron rammed this with the nose of the *Darkome*, but its tail was set firm on the rock be-

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neath. It only bent with their weight, and the strange creatures inside shrilled screams of fear and dropped from the hulk by the scores.

But past the wrecked hulk Mion saw the other raider, poised and waiting, and slashed his beam right through the wrecked ship, triggering the pulsing force again and again to make sure. The second ship, too, fell apart under the ray. Fragments spun right and left and as he passed the matter-dissolving ray over them again and again, both ships fell into a jumble of fragments from which the survivors scrambled madly in flight.

"Now," bellowed Tyron, "will someone tell me what kind of creature that is?"

Mion grinned at him, relaxing a little, hoping they would have no more trouble with the raiders who seemed all to be fleeing into the darkness of the central tunnel. "There used to be a God called Proteus, who could look like anything he chose to, having a certain kind of protoplasm in him that required no bones or other structure. Seems to me these things are something like that—an animal that resembles any animal it chooses to shape itself into."

Saphele was already opening the air-lock, and before Mion could stop them, four of the Peirans left the ship, began to paw through the wrecked fragments. They were back in a short time with two wounded raiders in their arms, for the weight here at the core was near nothing. They secured them with chains to the bulkheads in the storage compartments. Mion turned over the ray control to Tyron, went to interrogate these strange beings.

The rest of the Peiran fleet were already coming down the shaft, and there was no reason to stop them. Soon the whole of the great tunnel in the core was bright with lights and the Peiran ships ranged side by side. The whole fleet sent out a party afoot from each ship to hunt down the raiders, who must remain here in this tunnel at the core. There were smaller side tunnels branching off, up which the fleeing raiders had disappeared.

Several of the *Darkome's* Nortan crew piled out to inspect the wrecked ships, for it was their first contact with the weapons and techniques of the races beyond the Barrier.

When the firing began in the side tunnels, Mion sent two Nortans to check on the aliens' use of weapons. They found the Peirans in a bad way, unable to reach the enemy, yet the enemy was firing upon them around bends in the tunnels—firing a device which sent a sizzling charge of corrosive energy that flowed swiftly along the rock, leaping off when it reached a Peiran. Mion, after this report, called the pursuit off, ordered all hands back aboard. He did not care for casualties in a struggle as pointless as this, with an already defeated enemy. The weapon with the strange affinity for human flesh, that flowed like water along rock walls up or down, he meant to have analyzed at once.

The telaug beam soon extracted

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from the alien prisoners all the information needed. But it was an experience disconcerting in the extreme, to interrogate minds—whose every thought was in a form unfamiliar and unexpected, based on values and concepts totally unacceptable to his own mind as natural thought. These protean creatures, whose shape changed from minute to minute as their body adapted itself to its environment—both in color and in shape—also thought in a flexible, protean flow of meaning nearly incomprehensible to Mion, seeking as he could not help seeking, for fixed concepts, rigid thought forms of recognizable repetitive value.

He learned that they were a young race, for they had little history to recount to him. They had found the ships in the twin-planet core-chamber by accident, in their first flights in their own clumsy ships, and had copied them in building more. They had begun their raids through the Barrier in the expectation of acquiring more ships and more varied weapons, and they had been extremely cautious and secretive, for the telaug apparatus on the ships they found had given them a healthy respect for the technology that had created it.

They were an unlovely blob of gray flesh, soft in appearance. The blob put out limbs to walk, two to four to eight, depending entirely upon the whim of the moment. They put out eyes on soft round stalks, but Mion gathered this was mere imitative reflex; they did not need eyes, being light-sensitive over their whole surface. They were not extremely powerful, but they were tough. Their rubbery nature and boneless structure made them immune to the strains and velocities which gave mankind so much discomfort and so many injuries in space flight.

But more important, the minds Mion examined gave him a picture of an enemy they feared, an enemy they called the *Daegun*.

This was a race living far away, but whose ships raided the tribes of the protean men for slaves. From every picture Mion could get of the Daegun they were highly advanced technologically, and might prove formidable opponents. They were warlike, possessed space ships, and made a practice of enslaving all other races they contacted. Mion took counsel with the Oracle and the other Peiran notables, and together they decided to tell the *Omini*—as the proteans called themselves—that their fleet would aid them against the Daegun in return for their help in finding homes beyond the Barrier.

Meanwhile the twin-planets had passed within the Barrier flow. They could feel the tug and pulse of the terrible weight-causing particles surging all about the little planet—held away from them by the sheer density of the rock that had passed so many times through the tidal bath of gravitons. Mion privately suspected that the Barrier flow would shrink anything human it fully contacted into a tiny black doll of rock-like hardness, no matter whether the pull

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was neutralized by being from all sides at once. Therefore he moved all ships into the side tunnel berths, obviously fashioned for that purpose.

As the Barrier seized the planet, they felt the gravity pulse and flow and retreat and rise again. One of the Peirans happened to cross the shaft up which they would presently pass, and almost instantly she was crushed into nothingness against the rock floor. . . which explained to them all that the forces of the Barrier acted in a straight line only, and not around the right angle bend of the bottom tunnel.

After instructing the Omini on their intentions, they turned their prisoners loose unharmed, to act as their emissaries and arrange future meetings. Presently the pudgy creatures began to come in from the tunnels, eager for passage home again, now their ships were destroyed. Watching them change shapes (sitting down on a chair meant draping themselves upon it like a pile of wet wash) gave great amusement. And then quite suddenly the instruments told them the Barrier flow was behind. They were through! The new universe of unknown stars lay before them!

THE sky behind the Barrier had always been dimmed, the stars seemingly small and few and very far away. As the *Darkome* came out of the shaft and shot up into gravity-free space, the group behind Mion at the controls gasped in amazement at the blazing pattern of the star spangled night.

The Elder Oracle put a hand on Mion's shoulder, spoke in an awed voice: "I predict that one day in the far future this side of the Barrier will outshine the other in human achievement just as the stars on this side out-lustre our own familiar ones."

Saphele said: "The worlds that I touched here seemed infinitely richer in life. . . there is something here that is more favorable to it."

Mion turned his head to catch Saphele's eye, but found himself looking at Elyse, who had left her acceleration chair and was bent over him peering into the huge bow view-plates —which gave a larger magnification than any other view-plates on the ship. Mion grinned at her pert lovely face, so provocative . . . and his heart winced, for something about her reminded him of Arl. But he spoke at last. "It is that very fact that gives me caution, Averna, your Highness. Life here has had a better medium for growth. It follows that we may very probably come up against antagonists so formidable they may destroy us. Let us proceed with infinite precautions. Already the Omini have shown us there are powerful organized races, spoiling for a fight. We must not get into any battles until we are ready."

Averna nodded, her eyes going to Elyse with a hint of jealousy which she did not allow herself to voice. "That is wisdom. Our best course would be to ally ourselves with the Omini, begin building strongholds on

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their worlds. There seems to me little reason why we can't get along with them. Our very difference from them gives us no reason to antagonize, but the reverse. If they were human, they would have human motivations—and reasons for competitive struggle would inevitably arise. But they are not even carnivorous, and being a water race, have little use for land!"

Mion set the course for the Omini's home planet, and turned away from the controls. There was no reason to watch for the automatic ray relay's would thrust the ship aside or over any obstacle that might appear ahead. Mion gestured to Saphele.

"Call one or two of those Omini up here. The telaug beam will augment their thought for all to hear, and perhaps we can make plans with them about the future."

When the shapeless, gliding things appeared, Mion swung the inter-ship master telaug beam inward to the bridge chamber, focused it on the two Omini. They subsided into bulging globular rounds, without limbs or eyes or other prominences, their nervousness betrayed only by a quivering of their gray skin. Their thought, augmented into deafening audibility by the huge tel-augmenter, filled the control chamber with a nervous question: "What can this strange creature want with us now?"

Mion stood with his hands on his hips, his big legs spread wide, his handsome face expressing complete curiosity and friendly intent. "We want only to be friends with the Omini." began Mion. "We would not have attacked your craft in the shaft had not we thought of you as pirates, who in our society are people who kill first and ask questions later. Do you understand we would not have fired on you if we had known you meant no harm?"

The telaug blared out their understanding—and their other thoughts, such as: "Is he lying, getting ready to betray all our people into destruction, as the Daegun would do?"

Mion motioned to Averna. "Put your head into the telaug beam, so that they may read truly your intent toward them, dear Elder."

Averna hesitated an instant, her eyes going to Mion so that he read within them her doubt that he meant only the Omini to see her inward thought. But she stepped into the path of the telaug beam, so that it touched her before the Omini, carrying her thought into their minds powerfully. Everyone there could hear her clear, sweet meanings: "We are a race seeking a home where we may be free of unpleasant restrictions. We want to bring our whole race here and make a new beginning. We are strong in wisdom, and we can protect you from the evil Daegun whom you fear if you will help us get a foothold here beyond the Barrier."

There was a wealth of other meanings in her mind, and quite discernible to Mion was one which seemed to shriek at him. "You, Mion, are on my mind day and night. What am I to do if you find me not beautiful? What can I make of my life with my heart bursting with desire for

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this great strong giant of a man who will not let his heart stray toward me?"

Mion understood her hesitation, though such thoughts Averna managed to keep below the level of immediate appearance, still Mion and most of the others were skilled in the use of the telaug and such minor and repressed thoughts stood out to them plainly. But only Mion flushed with embarrassment. Averna looked at him coolly, her face betraying nothing of what the ray had revealed to him.

The Omini revealed that they had heard and understood the main part of her message to them. Their thought was tinged with a growing hope that perhaps their days of peril from the raids of the Daegun were over. They thought, almost together: "The Daegun who enslave us to make us catch fish for their tables may not enjoy their next raid. ..."

The conference Mion carried on for some two hours, exhausting every possible avenue toward linkage of the future of the Omini with their own. It was apparent from their amphibious nature and their knowledge of undersea life and geography they could be very valuable to a race of land dwellers like the Peirae. Then he gave one of the Omini a present. It was a small portable telaug, of the type carried about by many Nortans for conversation and business. It was good over a range of only a few feet, so they could not use it to spy upon others in the ship, but between themselves they would find it invaluable in conveying the correct description of their conference with Mion and Averna. The round protean body of the Omini who received this gift quivered with pleasure until they feared he might spill over the deck, but he glided off with his companion still quivering.

TWO days later they were lowering to a landing over an Omini city, which was built on the water, supported on bladders of air. Mion wondered what they did when they had a storm. He put a ray into the big storage chamber where a score of the strange creatures waited, and learned quickly they had a method of submerging the whole city when the surface of their ocean became rough.

"A submersible city!" cried Mion, watching the strange floating assembly of structures beneath them. The *Darkome* plunged into the water with a hiss and a mighty roar as the sea fountained up behind them. Mion let the depth of the water counteract their speed; then the *Darkome* bobbed to the surface not far from the floating city.

The structures were rather extensive, for so fragile a method of building. They looked like innumerable toy balloons made into dome-shaped houses. The city spread as far as eye could see across the slowly heaving ocean, the houses moving with the swell like anchored boats.

One after another the smaller Peiran ships plunged into the water, bobbed to the surface, swung into

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place alongside the *Darkome*. Mion swung a ray to tell three of them to stay aloft as lookouts.

Out from the queer low dome-houses came swarming throngs of the rubber-shaped creatures, hurrying toward the water's edge. And each of them bore one of the weapons that could throw the deadly charge with an affinity for flesh—an affinity that made aim of the weapon almost unnecessary. Mion ordered everyone to stay inside the ships until their Omini passengers had had time to circulate their message. These disembarked, their bodies rippling with eagerness and happiness to be home again.

Shortly afterward, a group of four of the Omini requested admittance to the *Darkome*. After they were aboard, Mion extracted by means of the telaug the knowledge that they had come to guide the *Darkome's* leaders to suitable locations for their cities on the land, and to confer on measures for mutual defense against the Daegun.

Mion took the *Darkome* aloft, to circle the globe at low altitude, and let the Omini chiefs—for that is what they were—point out the locations they thought best suited, as well as any dangers that might be there.

It was a planet of much water and little land. The continents were large islands, little more. But they were heavily wooded, evidently of very rich soil. The air was balmy, the temperature amazingly even. The Omini explained that this was due to the cloud envelope, in turn due to the heavy water content of the air. In spite of dampness it seemed a healthful world, and Mion noted that the Omini seemed to have no sickness or disease, for in questioning them over the telaug they seemed to have so little concept of the meaning of the words that Mion gathered that illness was almost unknown among them.

There were some terrific water monsters, but Mion noted that the land animals they described were for the most part herbivorous; there were no large carnivores, and no other races of intelligence. Mion looked at Averna, and she nodded. " 'Twill do for our first foothold. After we have a strong base here, we can explore further and select the world we mean to make our principle center. Right now, I think it best not to show ourselves to the other worlds; not until we are prepared for trouble."

Mion mentally agreed, and set the *Darkome* down on a plateau of the largest land mass, near a thousand feet above the water level. The tremendous forests extended everywhere, but the heavy grasses of this plateau had outfought the tree seedlings, and for nearly a mile there were few trees. Then the forest swept on unbroken as far as eye could see.

Mion swung a signal ray to the fleet, ordering them to take cover in the forest about the plateau, so that they could not be seen by any scouting ship of the Daegun. He had no wish to bring on an attack prematurely.

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Soon after the fleet had been concealed in the forest Mion returned the Omini chieftains to their homes, and then concealed the *Darkome* beneath the huge trees of the plateau. By nightfall they had thrown up the beginnings of an emcampment, and started to plan their first city, a city in the trees.

Mion had spent some time questioning the Omini as to their captives from previous trips. He was overjoyed to learn they had killed none, preferring to keep them for their skills, to learn everything they could from them. But a raid by the Daegun had some months ago cost them their captives and most of the machinery they had brought back with them from the raids—which explained their latest trip, for more captives and more machinery. They meant to learn to manufacture the strange weapons and delightful stimulative rays of the other side of the Barrier, but had not progressed so far.

"So Arl is a captive of these Daeguns!" mused Mion. "First thing I must get done is to capture a few of that race for study."

But it was nothing that could be rushed. A Peiran city was always erected upon extensive subterranean borings, which were used for havens of safety in event of war, as well as for storage and for the protection of their vital mechanisms from rust and damp. Here in this water-saturated air, such caverns were particularly necessary, and to be dry they must be deep. Only in the depths of rock where the pressure renders the rock impervious to moisture does the dryness necessary for long life of metal prevail.

The work well begun, Mion made ready to take the fleet back, for the *Darkome* must escort the weaker Peiran vessels to the twin planets to make sure they were not attacked. Then he meant to return to watch over the new colony until the next swing of the twins through the Barrier.

The fleet lifted from among the forest giants, glittering in the diffused sunlight like great elongate water drops. The colony was far from completely prepared for attack, yet they could not wait, as they would miss the time when the twins plunged through the Barrier and have to wait three months longer until they returned. Everything seemed safe enough. They had bored several deep caverns for refuge, and they had mounted dozens of powerful ray-rifles about the cavern entrances for defense from attack from the skies. They had no illusions that the Daegun had not heard of their arrival, though it might be they had not.

After the return of the next load of colonists, Mion meant to make up a party for exploration, hoping to find where Arl might be and hoping the Daegun would not prove too formidable for general attack.

But it was not to be. Hardly had he seen the fleet of small Peiran ships into the shaft of the smaller twin, and turned back toward the planet of the Omini, when a gunner sang out from his post at his ray-

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mount: "Strange ships on the port screens, Commander!"

"Where? How many?" bellowed Tyron, snapping the bow screens on full magnification.

They were bearing down on the *Darkome* from their back trail, at least thirty of them, queerly shaped craft like long boxes with rounded ends. Mion recognized them from the Omini's mental pictures. The ships of the Daegun!

"Draw 'em out." muttered Mion to Tyron at the controls. "Play along, run from 'em, see what they've got. Let 'em think we're frightened of 'em."

Tyron turned the *Darkome,* ran before the oncoming fleet like a rabbit before a pack of hounds. They spread out, swept on to encircle the *Darkome,* and from the nearest horn of the semi-circle a dark projectile leaped, spun toward them with a great display of fire in its tail.

"Some sort of torpedo. Better knock it off with a ray," ordered Mion over the intercom to all the gunners at their posts. A dozen rays leaped out to touch the torpedo. It went up with a vast burst of fire—too much for a simple chemical bomb.

Tyron glanced up at Mion, leaning over him. "Strap in, chief," grinned Tyron, "Didn't you recognize that burst? Too great to be gunpowder—they've got atomic fission or something near as bad. We've got to be ready to dodge."

Mion got into the seat beside Tyron, belted the padded straps about him. Tyron swung the big ship in a sharp curve, to see what the Daegun could do with sudden changes in course at this speed. Their pursuit came around loggily, lost speed, the gap between them widened. Mion touched Tyron's shoulder, and he let the *Darkome* slow. The gap closed up again.

"When it comes to questions, Tyron, I've got one for you. How come these Daeguns cut loose on us? They can't know who we are or have anything against us. Do they fire on every stranger they see?

"Even if they knew who we are, there's little reason in it. That is a question. What are they fighting about? Just to capture a strange ship, and so know all there is to know about them?"

Several more torpedos were loosed after them, and as quickly blown up by a detonating ray before they came close to the *Darkome.* Quite suddenly Mion tired of the game. He spoke over the intercom: "We're swinging around, taking the fight to them. Fire at will! I'd prefer none of them returned to carry the tale of our presence on this side of the Barrier."

Tyron, feeling also certain they had nothing to fear but the torpedoes, swung the *Darkome* in a dizzying bow-for-tail spin, flung on full power. In seconds they were gaining speed along their own back-trail, and the Daegun were dead ahead. The maneuver startled their former pursuers, and they turned right and left, tossed torpedoes out which all went wide of the mark. The relative velocities of pursuer and pursued had al-

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tered so suddenly they could not adapt, though the *Darkome* was still traveling slowly. They sped right past her as she lashed at them with sudden deadly rays. One after another the Daegun craft wavered, slowed, zig-zagged off out of control. Within minutes there was no Daegun ship moving normally, and Tyron swung the *Darkome* again. One after another he dangled magnetic cables which locked to the wrecked ships, until he had the whole fleet trailing him on cables.

"The Peiran technicians may want to remodel these ships and at the least they can serve as decoys to bring more ducks down on the pond."

Mion detailed a squad of Nortans to search the captured craft, question the prisoners, learn their strength and location. As the first of these reported back, Mion listened with deep attention.

"They were here to learn the secret of the passage through the Barrier, they've been watching the Omini for some time. They know that now that other nations have come through the Barrier, they will have new enemies disputing their domination. Thus far they've been kings of this star system. They attacked us because they knew the Omini brought us through—at least they thought so."

"What do they look like?" asked Tyron.

"With your penetray control right beside you, you yet ask. Take a look!" growled Mion.

Tyron swung the ray control, and the ships on the end of the tow line became transparent. At the same time Mion swung a telaug beam, so that they could both see and hear the captives aboard the Daegun ships.

"Big devils, eh?" grunted Tyron, in astonishment.

They were the things Mion had seen indistinctly in the pink monkey's mind, worshipping in their weird temple in the jungle. However, he doubted that these giants were primitive jungle dwellers, as those had been. These were members of an advanced race, however sinister their appearance. They were evidently some order of Decapod, highly developed. Their claws had become refined into respectable tools, though evidently still weapons on occasion. Their exterior skeleton was retained in all its original horny glory, and it looked as if they were accustomed to spending a lot of time polishing those shells and ornamenting them with gold inlay. They stood fully as tall as Tyron if not taller. Their heads differed from one's idea of a crab, which is ordinarily headless; these Daegun had heads on top of their armor-plated bodies, spiny at the sides, with horny crests above what passed for their faces. Their faces were not in any way human. They had two eyes, with an added third eye where the nose would ordinarily be, and a wide mouth surrounded with outrageous whiskers, some two or three feet long, though they were really bristles or a kind of antennae. They were big, and they looked formidable, and their ships were strongly

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built. If they had had rays, instead of chemical explosives for weapons, the meeting might have come out differently.

"I want to know what became of Arl, and I want to know it now. Would you find out, Tyron? If I asked them—" Mion turned his face away from his friend's, "—I am afraid I might go berserk and slaughter them all out of hand . . . if I learned they had killed her, or something of the kind."

Tyron understood, and turned the ship over to Mion. Taking a portable telaug and three armed guards, he departed for the towed ships.

Meanwhile Mion examined the strange creatures. He had run across many forms of intelligent life, but had never yet found highly developed intelligence in one risen from the Decapoda. But above that tremendous carapace reared a head very evidently containing a highly developed brain . . . and Mion realized anew that he must adjust to conditions here beyond the Barrier which must of necessity be extremely different, separated as it had been for eons from the streams of life on the other side. Here no human race had spread its all-embracing culture through the universe an age before, to lay a path which all future development must of necessity tread on its upward rise. Here, life had developed without the intervention and control of the ancient Elder humans. Here, chance alone had dictated which species would survive and which pass into limbo. Here chance alone had ruled the cards of fate. Hence human design had never entered into the past pattern of life's very beginnings, as on so many worlds on the other side of the Barrier. There, the Elder pioneers had planted micro life on many sterile barren worlds just coming into a range of temperature and moisture, capable of supporting life. There, the gigantic ships of the Titans had spread far and wide their chosen seeds of life, to provide in the future a pattern predetermined by them as the best of all possible life patterns. They had planted the very bacteria which made the soil able to support plants, and then had followed up with the seeds of the redwood, the pine, the fir and eucalyptus, to bring their future worlds of colonization into a state of beneficence for their own life forms as rapidly as possible. Here, all had been chance, so far as he now knew, and there could exist any possible combination of life forms or unbelievable monstrosities—as well as unbelievable beauties—of completely mysterious beginnings. He longed to set out at once on an extended tour of these strange new worlds . . . But, as ever, duty to those he loved held him inexorably.

Mion waited, thus pondering, and watching Tyron interview the captives aboard their own ships one by one. Meanwhile, the *Darkome* sped back toward the planet of the Omini.

It was perhaps two hours later when Tyron returned, and the *Darkome* had almost reached the midway point between the Barrier and the

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planet of the Omini. Mion eyed Tyron as he came in, sat himself down in the acceleration chair, and thoughtfully fastened his straps. Then he leaned back, stretching his long legs and reaching for the nozzles in the wall cabinet which could exude any delectable combination of potions the Nor food industry manufactured. He dialed several on the mixing dial, his face empty of expression, and watched his glass fill with the resulting powerful intoxicant. His eyes did not meet Mion's even once. Finally Mion could stand it no longer, and bellowed, "Well!"

Tyron sighed, setting down his drink half finished. "They're a tremendous power, *Admiral.*" Tyron never used Mion's official title unless their business together was very serious. "Some eighty planets pay them tribute. Their space fleet numbers in the tens of thousands—none of them know exactly how many ships in all. They are a titanic Power, and how we are going to get away with this attack on them I don't know. Even the *Darkome* can't knock them out of the sky altogether, though perhaps we might bluff them into thinking we can. Once they learn who and what we are, our days are numbered, for even if we defeat them today, they will be back tomorrow with more and worse."

"Why did they attack us?" asked Mion, his face a mask of iron.

"Because every ship that moves in space must bear a license from the Daegun officials. It is a number painted on the bow. We will have to simulate the number to avoid battle, otherwise every ship we see will attack us, as everyone who does not pay the tribute is fair game for piracy, confiscation . . . all the rest of it. They're slavers. That's what has become of Arl—sold into slavery."

Mion's face brightened. "Then you didn't learn that she is dead."

Tyron shook his head. "In some ways, she's lucky. They aren't human, have no use for a woman other than work. And Arl is strong—work would not hurt her. They have no experience with stim or beneficial rays of any kind. In fact, their ray science is rudimentary, they think of rays as light!"

"It is remarkable that they have progressed so far, not knowing the value of beneficial rays in thinking power!"

"Yes. They have great natural intelligence. Their ships are well built, well fitted, capably designed. I would rather they were on our side, Mion. In the Daegun mind the Omini are but a lowly form of life, a little lower than cattle, fit only for work or to shoot for sport. They have no regard for them."

Mion nodded. "I had suspected as much. But tell me, is there any other nearby race they do fear?"

Tyron nodded. "That shaft and tunnel in the little twin told me that sometime in the past humans came through the Barrier. We don't know who or when. But these Daegun fear us. When they saw me and the Nortan warriors, they called us *"Ellans."*

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Their way of saying it reminded me of ancient Hellas—whose people were called Hellenes. Not the latter Hellas, but the ancient cavern Hellenes. To the Daeguns, such a name may have become 'Ellans'. They fear these Ellans. whatever they are, and they are human in appearance. But they see them very rarely."

"It will be interesting to contact a race cut off for an age from all contact with the mother races. Interesting to note what development they have made, separated from all other men. It will be very different."

Tyron nodded: "Aye, chief, if we should live so long. But I doubt we're going to survive. I think this outfit communicated with another ship, which has gone for help. There's a secretive something in their minds, and as near as I could pluck it from them, that's it. They are used to telaug, having acquired some in the loot they took from the Omini. So they try to hide their thought, knowing I'm reading it. We can't run—not with their ships in tow—and we can't abandon them: the Peirae will need the hulls for rebuilding."

"So. Best to make it back to the colony as fast as we can and conceal all evidences of our presence. Chances are they won't locate us quickly. We'll soon be in shape to hold off any number of them, from what I've seen of their weapons."

"They're making new weapons, copied from some they got from the Omini loot. They've got the idea of ray, now, and will soon be formidable."

"The science needed for manufacturing ray weapons they will not learn in a day, Tyron."

"But they are clever boys. Their minds are like quicksilver under the telaug beam, running every which way with a hundred fresh born ideas even as you speak to them."

"You don't think we could take the *Darkome* right up to their chief city and demand Arl? They'd fight before they'd parley, you think?"

"They would, dear Mion. They're inordinately proud, having ruled the roost around here for a thousand years. No one is going to bluff them, because they won't back down till you knock them down. I think the best chance is to wait till you can knock them down with out loss to yourself. These Peirae are not ready to take on any such Power as the Daegun yet. But, by planning it carefully, in a year we should be able to deal them such a defeat they'll give us anything we want."

"A year! Tyron, I'll not sit here a year and let fate take its course with Arl! I'll go after her if I have to go alone!"

"Of course, Mion. But no use getting yourself killed. You'd hardly benefit her that way. It seems to me the *Darkome* must be held as our ace, to throw in as a last powerful resort if the smaller ships can't handle things. After we get things lined up, that is. Until then, too, we've got to keep the *Darkome* concealed, use her only as a surprise measure, after the smaller craft fail to defeat the Daegun."

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Mion almost snarled. "You're counciling cowardice!"

Tyron shook his head. "Counciling the greatest good to the greatest number. But of course, you'll have the *Darkome* bear the brunt of all the fighting that's bound to come. What use will we be to anyone with her crippled?"

"Nevertheless I'm not hanging back from battle, just because it's more sensible. If you wanted to be sensible, you could have remained on Nor, not stirred a foot out of your bed."

Tyron grinned. "You wrong me, Mion! I am only trying to indicate the course of true wisdom. However we will do what seems natural, do all the fighting for the little women. That's what they brought us for. And when everything is set up the way they want it, we'll go home, without reward or honor, time lost in a nameless cause. Mion, what are we going to get out of this?

"I'm keeping my eyes open, Tyron. We'll have our own rewards, one way or another. I came here for Arl, primarily. They invited me for that reason."

"It must have seemed opportune to them. The great war-captain of the Nortan-Jotun war, so easy to come by. . . Just tell him his wife is in the hands of the enemy."

Mutan shook his head. "It's possible. I will not rest till I turn that empire upside down and shake Arl out of it."

"Agreed," sighed Tyron, filling his glass again. "But it's a whopping big empire, even by Nortan standards. However, size doesn't mean much, confronted with our weapons. Still I say they *are* going to spring something. Those captives aren't at all down in the mouth. They expect us to be surprised by something very soon. Something long and dark and deadly. . ."

"Long and dark and deadly—you picked that from their minds, and couldn't pick the rest? What kind of watcher are you?"

Tyron smiled, swirling his glass. "You go and read the crabs' minds yourself. They've got *minds,* those boys. What long, dark, deadly thing could threaten us, but some other sort of torpedo . . . perhaps a device with radio control? That would seem what they were thinking, and didn't know any more about it themselves. A big, fast torpedo . . ."

But they were coming in to the Omini world, and Mion set the captive ships in an orbit around the watery world, then started ferrying them down to the water's surface one by one. After he had them down, he began the work of towing them up the slopes of the beach and under the gigantic trees where they would not readily be seen from the sky. The prisoners he turned over the Omini for safekeeping, taking only twenty of them along to the plateau for the Peirae to examine.

The Oracle Averna took charge of the captives at once, assigning one of her Peiran menticons to each captive to get a thorough picture from each mind. She meant to learn every-

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thing there was to know about these Daegun. Mion and his Nortans turned in for sleep in the newly bored caverns under the plateau, marveling as they descended in the elevator at the speed and excellent workmanship of these small females, so lovely and delicate of appearance. One would never think they could in so short a time accomplish a task of this magnitude.

"Elevators, already!" cried Tyron, crowded in beside Mion in the lift which was none too big for the two of them, giants that they were.

"Didn't know they had the material for such construction," Mion said. "Our Nortan engineers could pick up a few tricks from these women. They certainly never dirtied a fair hand in the job, yet they got it done."

Tyron grinned. "They've been preparing for this for years. Had this stuff all crated, ready for assembly. All they had to do was carve out the shaft with the rays, install the lift at the top of the shaft, and she's ready to go. Just the same, they're pretty clever. Bet you they've got chambers all furnished at the bottom, in the warmer rock where it's dry, and with ventilators freshening the air. Bet you won't even smell the dis-dust from the work, either. That's a woman for you. If it had been Nortan engineers, the place would still be smelling of grease and dust a year later."

WHEN Mion and the other Nortans returned to the surface, the Peiran menticons were still at work, taking roll after roll of tape recordings from the minds of the captive Daegun. They placed their subjects in the dream state, then suggested questions which the mind unconsciously answered truthfully. Mion took a seat beside one of the technicons whom he knew.

"How goes it, Thia? Anything significant?"

"I'm glad you're here, Captain-General. There are several things we've picked from these minds that need a military evaluation. I'm just not up to the mark in things military."

Mion lounged deeper in the small Peiran chair, spreading his legs, eyeing her sleepily. "Everyone addresses me by a different title—it's quite confusing," murmured Mion.

"This time I'm correct. Our Elder has just created the post of Captain-General of all fighting forces, and pinned it on you. She'll be formally anointing you before long. Most of us are delighted to have you take charge of the fighting. We know little enough of killing. But listen to this —"

She set a play-back mechanism going beside Mion which projected directly into his mind both the thoughts and mental pictures of the captives. Mion listened, apparently sleepily, but suddenly sat up, his eyes going to Thia's in surprise. Then he sagged again.

"That's what I feared we'd run into. Thia, there's *derrish* among these Daegun. That's what that means! This fellow belongs to the

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derrish group. They're conscious of their difference from normal non-destructive types, and have organized for protection from the sane members of their society. That means, if these der-minded members of the Daegun are really in control, we'll never be able to make a treaty with them! Simply because no der-mind ever kept a treaty or any other bond of honor. It isn't in them."

"I had surmised that much. But did you note . . . ?"

"Yes, girl, I noted their method of removing the clean, non-destructive children from the lists of breeders. Because of their nature—being egg layers who lay large numbers of eggs—it is natural they should have had some system of limiting their numbers. They do it by destroying the eggs. You noticed they have let the breeding get into the hands of these Daegun derrish? That means the derrish destro all eggs except those from their own destructives! That means that in time, if not already, the Daegun will be one hundred per cent demoniac!"

Thia nodded. "What I wanted you to see! Nearly eighty per cent of these captives show a heavy preponderance of detrimental error in their thinking. Under these A-3 order benevolent suns it's unusual to find it so high, and I wondered, and so uncovered their breeding methods—controlled by the derrish to cause an ever higher number of hereditarily tainted births. Sad day for the Daegun when they failed to destroy their first destructives. Now they are themselves destroyed!"

Mion mused, crossing his legs, absently running one big hand over his close-cropped black curls. "Destroying all eggs from the sane normal members of their society! How long have they been following that program?"

"For six generations, Lord Mion. I've taken a reading from their sun. It's that bright pink star just over the constellation of the Crab. Queer co-incidence, their sun above the Crab, and them a race of crabs. The reading is nearly identical with the index from old Earth's sun long ago, before the first sun-burst that wiped the surface clean of all the ancient works. It was a time of war and vast unrest on earth, before the first migration."

Mion eyed her with a smile. "I was there, girl! I quite agree with you—it was a time of unusual deviltry, and the deros got control of things. But we cut them down a little. I was but a ro under Vanue."

"*You,* from that ancient time? But you're not big enough : . ." The Peiran menticon was suddenly in confusion, her eyes frightened on Mion's. Mion reached out a hand to her, touched her arm soothingly.

"No need to be disturbed just because I'm a few centuries older than you thought, Thia. Vanue the glorious is a technicon of mighty attainments. She has a system of culture which allows growth without unnecessary increase in size. Size can get mighty uncomfortable, and she's fought it for an age, with some suc-

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cess."

"You probably rank our own Elder! I didn't expect this."

"Banish it from your mind, Thia. It's of no importance. Let's to the matter at hand. Give me that sun-reading you took from their star."

Thia handed him a slip with the figures in a row. Her eyes were downcast, and she wondered inwardly what this great one estimated her worth . . . and put the thought aside.

Mion studied the slip, then took pencil and pad and began to scribble computations. "They must be getting a little uncomfortable with each other by now," he muttered. Then he looked up at Thia. "I'd say they were ripe for civil war. A little fomenting and they'll fall on each other. It's up to us to salvage the normal beneficials, see to it the demoniacs destroy each other. Then set up an egg control so that only the sane normals reproduce."

"There's no correcting this wide hereditary error in the prisoners we have! The structure of the brain cells themselves is prone to error, lets in disintegrant ion flows in preference to the normal ion flows from the brain centers. Even the shell structure of their brain case is not normal to the index in the Decapod Cabulare. The calcium molecules are radiant with disintegrance. Nearly conductors, instead of insulators, those brain cases . . ." Thia ran on in confusion, wondering if the Elder Mion beside did not think her infantile, giving him all this which he had probably already deduced without definite examination. "Whatever will we do with the prisoners? It's like keeping demons on a leash!"

Mion thoughtfully ran over the thought records, noting the lack of syllogism, the illogical patterns of thought, containing no sign of observation of cause and effect, or of reasoning from point to point of logic, but only assumptions based on teachings absorbed from their mother's talk, only illogical conclusions arrived at without due process of thought, from superstitions and prejudices age-old among them. Idly he wondered what this race, with their so-active minds, might have become if they had learned some respect for logic, had learned that a sound social organization must base on Tee, the natural attraction of unit for unit, on the respect for the unit's right to survival and reproduction.

"Active minds, running in a circle of error!" mused Mion aloud. "Too bad; too infinitely a loss of all values. Error, error—society is nothing until it learns to check out its mental error! These things must be destroyed, before they become truly monstrous destroyers in vast numbers. They are on the threshold of a completely destructive pattern of conquest."

Thia watched him, her own mind paralyzed with the realization she was here beside one of the great minds from the far past. "What are we to do with them, Lord Mion?"

"Eh? Send 'em back to work their ill upon their own source, of course. A little mental adjustment. Give

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them a hatred for their own organization, turn 'em loose to jam up their own mechanism of expansion. What else? A detrimental is of worst possible value to those he works with. Error is what they need, considering them as enemies to be destroyed. Here it is in quantity. Give it back to them, but pointed at their own hearts. Enough error and they are at each other's throats. Sides will form, and they will all be sure their side is the only side, and all others must die. Now, they take it out on other races, consider their own race as their side. We've got to start a split among them. These captives can be the opening wedge. Best thing to do is point up their mental works to hate their masters, then give 'em weapons capable of destroying the leaders but not powerful enough to turn against us even if they manufacture them in quantity. I've got to talk to the Oracle, decide what we can give 'em in quantity, or plans for something they can make in quantity . . ."

"They've got the telaug and some other weapons they captured from the Omini. Quite possibly that may be the very things we would not want them to have . . . we don't know exactly what material they did capture as the Omini did not know what the things were or how to use them." Thia sighed, her eyes flickering on Mion's with a kind of stage fright at his nearness.

"They could produce a whole system of ray weapons similar to our own, if they master just one small principal secret of their construction —they've got the industrial capacity to do it. They could turn out deadly things we'd have trouble with in months, and may do so. We can't wait—we've got to destroy this Daegun empire at once! Can't give 'em time to master the construction of those weapons they've captured!"

Mion leaped to his feet, strode away to seek the Oracle and make immediate plans for attack. Thia looked after his towering figure worshipfully. Mion heard her worship, looked over his shoulder and grinned boyishly. Thia turned back to her work, wondering dazedly how one could live so long and yet seem so very young, like one's own brother. She sighed, repressing her desire from force of habit—as all Peirans had had to do for so long.

THE torpedos and other weapons were stripped from one of the captured ships. After the menticons had completed conditioning the Daegun minds, they were to be crowded aboard the stripped ship and sent on their return trip to their homes. They would have no recollection of meeting the Peirae or the Nortans, no knowledge of the Barrier passage, when they awakened from their dream state. But they would have a powerful compulsion to start a movement toward rebellion, and they would have new weapons to help them in that work. Too, giving their new adherents a view into the minds of the rulers from a distance via telaug, would certainly acquire their loyalty quickly.

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As quickly as they had rid themselves of the captives, the engineers of the Peirae started work on the remainder of the captured ships, installing the vortex drive common to their own ships, installing the powerful disociator-rays and other weapons they had brought. They did not install the protective screens and shorter-ray devices necessary for defense against ray attack because indications were that knowledge of ray weapons did not yet exist here. The Omini had a slight knowledge of ray-use from their ships modeled after the wrecks in the twin-planet cavern. They knew they existed, but not how to build them. So they equipped the captured ships only with rays for attack.

"We'll be all right if the menticon work on those Daegun doesn't slip, somehow. If one of 'em remembers, though, it could mean a mass attack here." Mion was going over future plans with Averna, in her own new cavern dwelling.

"They will not remember. Our work is very skillful. They will not come here—but we must be ready, anyway."

"It is not the skill of your menticons, dear Averna, that worries me. It is the fact they are a kind of creature never before met by these menticons. An animal with an exterior skeleton, whose ancestors were crabs in the ocean, is hardly the same sort of subject for mental adjustment as a flesh and blood human."

"I am sure!" Averna insisted. "I ran several tests on the Daegun to ascertain their reactions. They will react exactly as we expect them to. There will be war among the Daegun in months."

"Meanwhile we must prepare to take full advantage of that war. I want to instruct these Omini in the use of our weapons, and equip several ships for them. But first I want you to send a 'health' survey party, to take their index *Tic,* to make sure we will not be raising up a race of destructives for future trouble. Understand?"

Averna, who had already arranged for such an examination, smiled languourously, leaning back in the swivel chair, stretched out her long graceful legs. "No, Lord Mion, I refuse to take orders from you."

Mion, thinking he had offended her, began to apologize.

Averna waved a long delicate fingered hand, lazily. "I'm tired, dear warrior. Either go away and let me dream, or take me in your arms and whisper sweet nothings in my shell-like ear. But on pain of my displeasure, no business until tomorrow."

Mion, hastily lunging to his feet, started toward the door, trying to beat his own reactions to her mood. He had taken three steps, when Averna said mildly, "Wait!"

"Wait, Hades!" Mion called over his shoulder. "Your weapons are too powerful for me, and I see you are in the mood to use them!"

Her laughter followed him down the corridor.

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THE ferry-work of the fleet in bringing the Peirans through the Barrier went on and on, as it would go on for many years before all were at last on this side. There was an endless lot of detail work in finding locations for new colonies, building the underground fortresses over which their fragile surface cities would be erected later. Training and equipping the Omini for warfare took much time, too.

"If it were not for the cursed Daegun, all this work would be unnecessary," swore Tyron, coming in from a hard day training the Omini in space maneuvers suitable for combat. Mion agreed, himself weary, having been busy all day superintending the laying of the keel for a new battle craft, the first of a series designed ultimately to outweigh the Daegun fleet.

"Aye, but if 'twere not them, 'twould be some other. These rich worlds must inevitably produce powerful life of one kind or another. Thank the Gods they are not more powerful than they are."

"Pray, instead, we have not been fooled in thinking them inferior. Those were crafty minds they bore, and I'm not satisfied they are as inferior as we assumed."

"I am fed up!" Mion suddenly exploded. "I'm taking the *Darkome* and raiding a few Daegun cities, starting a campaign . . . they can't stop the *Darkome!*"

Tyron eyed him, his face expressionless. After a moment he said: "I think you're right, myself. They can't stop the *Darkome,* and you would find Arl in time. But waiting until all is ready for a war is far safer for the Peirae. If we were captured, they would extract the whole plan of the Peirae from us. It risks everything they work toward."

"I can't wait! I'm only human. Anything can be happening to my wife. They can't expect it of me."

Tyron suddenly grinned. "They are probably expecting you to slip their gentle leash and make for the woods at any time. Chances are they will send part of their own forces with you—if not to help you, at least to make sure you return to the fold."

Mion paced up and down, his hands clenched, his cheeks flushed, his eyes flashing. "It draws you too, eh? The endless worlds lying out there waiting, untouched, unknown . . . anything might be found! Why do we sit here, tending the cattle for these little fairy people? Are we men, or cattle dogs?"

"Well, tell 'em out, tace 'em down, we're going to explore in the *Darkome.* Knock off a few cities of the Daegun, make sure they're too weak to attack the Peirae, then take off for a voyage around this system. They can't expect us to forgo exploration just to tend their plans for them. They're able enough. Get that ship you're laying down ready, so they have a powerful craft to take the place of the *Darkome.* How many weeks will that take? Three, four at the most. Then, hie ho and away! To Hades with the fair charmers, we've men's work to do."

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Behind them a little step rustled, and Mion spun around to find himself face to face with Saphele. But instead of the disapproval and anger he expected to see on her face, she was ecstatic. "Oh, yes! And let me go with you, Lord Mion. I will do anything, only take me too! Who would expect you to sit here with a new universe waiting . . . Oh, *do that!*"

Mion looked at her, standing on tip-toe with her hands clasped as if in prayer to him. She was as pretty as a child's doll, and he gave a sudden great laugh, caught her up by the elbows and swung her round, shouting. "We'll shake their petty reins, girl, and get off into the unknown, eh? No more of this!" Then he set her down, becoming deadly serious. "Now help us, Saphele, and we'll take you if we take no one else. Here's how we'll do it."

THE Oracle greeted the two great Nortans indulgently and bent a quizzical glance upon Saphele as if wondering how she came to be accompanying them on a call she instinctively knew presaged action. She knew well that these powerful, restless men could not be tied down here on this watery planet to await the turn of events. So she smiled and said mildly: "So, you come to petition me to allow a radical change in our program of activities. That much I can guess. What more is there that I cannot guess?"

"We've been discussing the whole project," began Mutan Mion, diffidently, keeping his eyes averted from hers, for he could not abide the warmth in their lovely depths, "and we have decided to ask permission to take the *Darkome* out on a few raids, to get some prisoners and some information on the activities of the people nearby. 'Tis hardly safe to sit here when trouble can well be brewing all about us. We've got to know . . ."

Averna went on smiling, indulgently, seated there in her chair under the trees overlooking the sea of the Omini, their bubble city a lovely bit of floating color on the horizon. The morning light was flattering to her fresh beauty. Her hair was piled high on her head, coiled gold fronted by a huge feather plume, and she looked very iota a queen. She bent a little toward the two giant Nortan officers, her incredibly attractive face turning serious, and said: "You both know I have no right to say you nay in your comings and goings —you need not ask permission. My only right in overseeing your activities here is to make certain they do not adversely affect the welfare of my people. If you are going out to stir up trouble that we can't handle, I say no! If you are really going to learn useful facts, carefully making certain no one learns where you come from or what you are; well and good. I will augment your crew with an equal number of my women, for they will cry 'Unfair' if you take Saphele and no other, for they all love you."

Mion wanted to say that all his men were becoming entirely too contented for warriors on an expedition

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of peril, that they were perhaps getting too much love to be entirely good for them, but said nothing. Instead he managed: "We are warriors on an expedition of exploration. We sit here waiting for attack, and it will surely come! It is not good tactics to neglect to learn more about the Daegun and these other races such as the *Ellans* they spoke of. It is inviting trouble. However well we think we could handle trouble if it comes to us, we may be wrong! Let us go, dear Averna, not one trip but many trips. Let us learn all we can about this area of space, and perhaps make it truly safe by destroying the nests of enemies that we know exist."

"You mean to carry the war to the Daegun?" asked Averna. "You mean to raid them, set them into confusion, agitate uprisings . . . you cannot leave warring alone? Are you sure it is not just restlessness?"

Mion still kept his eyes averted from hers, looking just over her shoulder. "I cannot sit still here not knowing what may be happening to my wife. It is beyond reason to expect it of me."

Averna noted the simple directness of his words, heavy with unbearable strain, and her heart was moved to pity. "Your sorrow is understood, Lord Mion, and we will help you to find her. Perhaps you are right, and other things must wait. We did not come here only to build our nests and raise nestlings. Go, and our love goes with you."

The three turned to go, overjoyed at her compliance in their plans. But Averna called: "One word with you alone, Lord Mion."

Mion turned back, knowing in his heart what she wanted. He stood facing her, and now he dared to look into her eyes. They stood there, a subtle but devouring lightning flashing between them. Eyeglances only, but laden with some terrific, more than human meaning. Finally Averna sighed, said: "Only one thing I ask. If you do not find this wife of yours, or find that she is dead, you will come first to me. Swear me that, on your honor!"

"Come first to you, Averna? And have you watched me all this time, and yet require an oath . . . ?"

Averna smiled, happiness welling up in her face like new blood. "Aye, Mion, I require it, for the good and sufficient reason there are other men about, this is *the new life* we are building. I'd not lose the hare for staring after the deer. Give me your oath, and I'll wait, keeping my heart clear as you keep yours clear for love of your own wife. Otherwise . . . what matters it? Any creature will do to assuage the pangs of unrequited love until love comes again."

Mion frowned. "I had thought more highly of your ideals . . ."

Averna cursed a sudden oath. "By the horns of Horus, Mion, don't prate to me. I'm too old to be gulled by any catchpenny phrases of morality. Life is a business of living. I love you, but I'm not one to spend an eternity mooning after any man. Either you determine your wife's fate

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and post-haste back to me, or you lose me as well! Your oath, Mion?"

"An oath is something not lightly given, Averna. Not by me, who keeps his oaths. I'll give you my oath to get back here as fast as humanly possible after I know Arl is dead. But it's a brand new universe, a deadly certain bait to lead one on and on after ever new wonders . . . I should hate to lose you by trying to make certain of you. You have my oath, Averna, to get back here. But my heart swings from you to others among the Peirae, and how do I know what tricks there may be at work, when suggestion and other means can be used to sway a man's heart like a windvane?"

"Mion, I'm only asking you to make no certain alliances with any other woman until I've my chance to fight for your love on equal terms. I've held back every unfair contrivance, and they've some of them used them. I want a square deal from you, that's all!"

Mion suddenly bent on one knee, took her hands and pressed each one to his lips. "Dearest ruler, you will get your square deal, and already you must know you have a place in my heart."

THE *Darkome* lifted from the morning sea of the Omini, the sea called by them the sea of Omon, and swung her dark prow toward the distant realm of the Daegun. Mion did not like the necessity of passing into the baneful influence of an evil sun, having had several experiences with the tricks they play with a man's thinking, making black white, and evil seem good. But the threat of that nation of crab-people had to be removed from the Peiran future, and he had to find his Arl again.

With him were all his own stalwarts of Nor, as well as an equal number of the Peirae, selected for their various abilities to search out the knowledge of the universe around. One was busily making star charts for navigation, another taking spectroscopic readings of the near stars, another had her sample cases ready to be filled with the varied life of each planet they touched, another a chemist to test that same life for peculiarities from the norm, another a geologist to study the rock outcrops . . .

Mion had opportunity to take with him several new fighting ships arrived in the last groups from beyond the Barrier, captains from other nations who had been recruited under the Peiran banner easily as soon as they learned that the Barrier had been pierced. But they were strangers to him, and he preferred to have by him only forces he knew well enough to trust. But the fact of the Barrier's secret having got out generally gave him much worry, for at any time some brawling nation might come crashing in upon them prepared to take over everything, for here the laws of the League would not hold as yet—and he hoped like the Peirans, never. But Elyse, listening to him think where she sat watching the wheeling stars on the scope screens,

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reassured him. "These fellows were requested to come along by our own agents, and the news has not gotten out. We figured we might need friendly strength, and they have strength and are well known to us. There is nothing to fear from them. They have long been traders and navigators for our merchants."

Mion only grumbled. "Out here there is no League to hold down lawless piracy, Elyse. Any one of these most friendly ship-captains can suddenly develop into a horror of cupidity, where there is no great power to hold him down. I hesitate to leave them behind, let alone take them along."

"Yet I see in your mind no love for the League. Why is that?"

"They have grown too old, too far from ordinary human affairs. Like their ruling on the Peirans, they lack sympathy. They are good, but too removed, too high and distant and cold."

Elyse nodded. "So I thought of them, not truly human any more. Immortals live too long to administer young and growing nations. The League is very ancient, and should choose new and younger representatives. Let us pray the secret of the Barrier does not get out."

"We can close the Barrier any time by destroying the smaller twin. But it is a deed that requires long thought to decide. It could lose us much . . . and myself especially many friends on *Nor* and *Enn*. On *Enn* especially there is much that I would not want to lose."

Elyse only twisted a lip in what would have been a sneer on a less lovely mouth. "Ah, Mion, they are better forgotten, and you better off without them to refer to and depend on. Forget the past, and build here a new life, after your own designs."

Mion eyed her, and slowly grinned. "That is what you want, little charmer, but is it what I want? There is so much there I cannot ever forget. Any more than I can forget my lady Vanue. No matter what great beauty and mind I meet, she will be paramount above all in my memory."

Elyse leaned toward him, serious and intent upon him, trying to weaken the hold of such as Vanue upon him. "But, truly, Lord Mion, how can you develop around such splendor and greatness? There can be no Mion when the sun is taken by some overshadowing mighty thing like that. Don't you see that in nature around you? A little seedling comes up under a great tree, it grows for a brief season or two, then dies for want of sustenance. All is taken away by the great thing above. Out here, we can each of us find room, unspoiled worlds waiting to nourish us into greatness. There, what real chance has one? Look how the Peirans have smothered and been denied, all because of an edict by the great court—an edict that in the enacting took but a few minutes of their time, yet caused us to suffer agonies for eleven centuries. We are not what we should have been if not overshadowed by the League. No, Mion, your way of growth is out

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here. Head this ship toward our greatness, Mion, and forget the dear past. Certainly, they are fine folk, granted. But they take up room, and one needs room and fresh worlds and untouched new raw soil for growth! Can't you see that?"

Mion laughed, a hard loud laugh of strain. "Aye, Elyse, I see it all too well. Think you I don't strain to go? I am held by my duty to the Peirae and to my wife. Which is where we are heading, to take the Daegun threat from off their horizon. Then, when I am sure they are safe, we head outward."

Elyse relaxed, satisfied that at least he understood where his own future lay. And she breathed a guilty little prayer that this wife of his would not be found.

THE first sign of the Daegun they had was three ships which rocketed up at them as they swung around a green little world to see . . . instant threat arrowing up. Tyron pulled the throttle back and the huge *Darkome* spurted ahead. The Daegun ships swinging after. They loosed torpedoes which the gunners exploded as before, and then Mion at the main ray gave them *shorter* in powerful doses to drop them as the firing of their jet motors failed. Dropping them by jerks, he managed to let them down on the water of the seas of the little world, then holding the ships motionless with the powerful *shorter* beams, he put a penetray into them, and shutting off the *shorter*, burned out the control cables with dis. Thus helpless, he put a telaug beam into them, ordered them overboard so that they might be picked up by the *Darkome* and examined.

He learned the war expected in the Daegun empire had occurred, and after see-sawing back and forth for many days, was now centering around a world only a few hours distant from the *Darkome*.

They marooned the Daegun on a little island in the sea, sent the captive craft back to the Omini for rebuilding, lifted again and headed for the world where the Daegun warred.

* * *

Now, a volume could be written of the *Darkome's* doings the next eight weeks, how she located the center of the Daegun rebellion and allied herself to them, led them in terrible raid after raid on the Daegun strongholds, swooping down with all rays blasting to lay them wide open to the following fleets of rebels, who finished the job . . . and then on to the next great stronghold, for the Daegun were a numerous people, and their power spread wide and deep over a dozen races and near a hundred far-flung planets.

How in the end, the Daegun power was broken and split up into a dozen warring cliques, each striving for power, and none of them getting it. How, after every raid and bloody destroying battle, the *Darkome* searched the ruins and the camps and the stockades where prisoners and slaves were kept, and searched every mind for news of the great limbed human captive from beyond the Barrier,

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or for news of *any* of the human captives said to be in the hands of the Daegun—and found them not.

How, in the end, Mutan Mion took the great Lord of all the Daegun captive into his ship, and stripped his mind of every information it contained—only to find the trail led to the Ellans, who had bought all the captive humans from the Daegun for, of all things, a cargo of rare fish the Daegun prized!

How the *Darkome* then abandoned the struggle, leaving the Daegun dismembered and warring with each other, and headed outward into unknown space toward the distant empire of the Ellans.

(To Be Continued)

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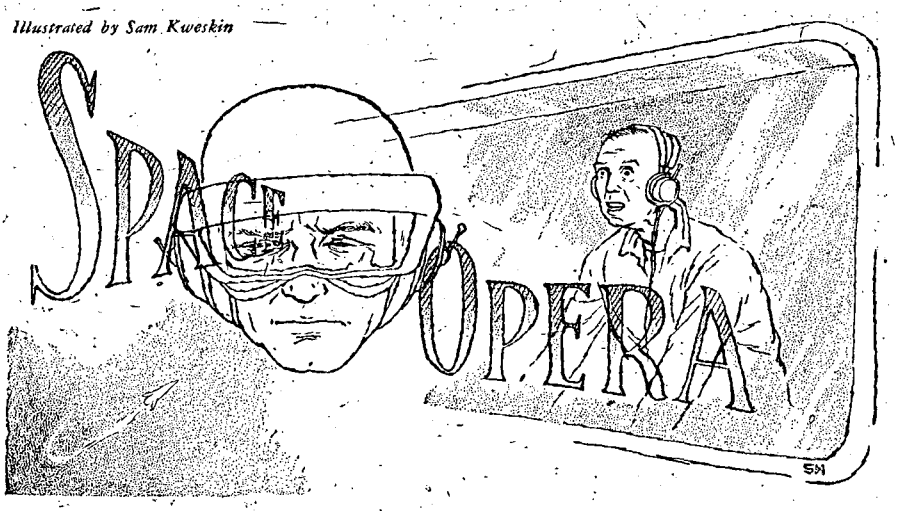
Illustrated by Sam Kweskin



Charles T. Webb

"I'M through," Rod Rockwell said. "I've had it."

The Director smiled patiently, tolerantly. "Now, Rod," he soothed, "you've said that before. I'm not worried—you've always come through."

Rockwell's anger mounted. The Director was *It*—the man who told other men what to do, the man who sat in the councils where policy was made, the guy who translated those decisions into action. But Rod Rockwell had had enough—more than enough. "Look," he said. "I gave notice a montn ago. I meant it."

"Sure, Rod, sure." The Director smiled oilily. "You can be through if you want to. *After* today. After you get out there and—"

Rockwell bit back unprintable words, fuming impotently. Finally he turned on his heel and strode through the door. He was a big man, big-boned, big-framed, thick-muscled. He looked like a spaceman—tough and hard and smart.

A FEW minutes later he climbed into his ship, his anger forgotten in the face of the job at hand. He barked orders crisply, made delicate adjustments, and the dials before him told the story as the *Tiger* blasted off. Once more Rockwell and his crew were boring cleanly into space, going out to meet the ever-menacing marauders from far-off galaxies. This time the odds were seven-to-one, but the objective was still

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heartbreakingly the same—to protect for the Corporation the lone planetoid of Grexo, to keep its valuable ores for the hungry machines of Earth. Far from home, always outnumbered, the men of Rockwell's crew often felt forgotten, neglected. Only his indefatigable will held them to their tasks.

Thirty thousand miles out they met the enemy—Xeppo and his pirates, back for more. The energy screens went up; the *Tiger* darted through space in impossible maneuvers. Swiftly, Rockwell loosed his beams—great ravening monsters of pure energy that took a terrible toll. One enemy ship exploded like an overripe melon, then another. Sweat poured from the faces of the men, and there was a sharp smell of ozone in the air.

"Jeez!" the exec said, trying to keep fear from his voice.

Rockwell grinned at him. "Stay with it, boy."

The exec returned the grin, squared his shoulders, and went back to work.

Her great generators growling in agony under the strain, the *Tiger* tumbled through space. Two more enemy ships fell victim to her energy beams before the remainder—flashing away in desperate evasive maneuvers—turned tail and ran.

A SHORT while later Rockwell brought his battered ship safely back to port. Disheveled, but wearing his famous grin, he stepped out on the ramp. Mary was there, her eyes adoring as always, and he draped an affectionate arm about her waist as they walked off together. He was sitting down wearily when the Director bustled up.

"Wonder, Rod, wonderful!" The Director beamed. "I saw the whole thing on my screen. You were terrific."

"Save it," Rockwell said. "I'm still quitting."

"Now, Rod—"

Rockwell shook his head, even as Mary looked up with sharp disbelief in her eyes. "Nope," he said, "I mean it. I'm going back to Broadway. This TV is too rough for me."

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Special Features

The MAN From TOMORROW

Personals

Sun-Bathers of Eros

Letters

Other Worlds Book Shelf

THIS special section of OTHER WORLDS is for your own participation and enjoyment. Here you will find your letters to the editor; your jokes (for which we will pay $1 each); your personal messages to your fellow readers (published free); reviews of science fiction books worthy of your attention; the latest news of what's going on in the world of authors, editors, rival magazines, fan clubs, even individual readers; your bookshop; cartoons; fact articles; interviews with individuals in the public eye and many others. If you have any suggestions as to improvements and additional features, remember your word is our golden rule.

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The Man from TOMORROW

SCORE another one for The Man From Tomorrow. In the August issue of OTHER WORLDS, which went on sale June 19, and which was written two months before that, an answer was made to William Hecht as follows: "No new land (will be found) in the Atlantic. No reappearance of Atlantis. But research will be made beneath the ocean, and remnants of unheard-of civilizations will be found."

Now let us quote from an AP dispatch from Hamburg, Germany dated August 24. "A German scientist says he has found what he believes to be a king's castle and a temple of legendary Atlantis on the bottom of the North Sea off Helgoland.

"Rev. Juergen Spanush (the scientist is also a clergyman—Ed.) said a diver of his expedition, following directions contained in the writings of the Greek philosopher, Plato, descended 30 feet and stood on a man-made wall. Spanush said this wall apparently encircled the fabled kingdom.

"The Encyclopaedia Britannica says Atlantis was a legendary island in the Atlantic. It adds that Plato describes in his writings how Egyptian priests represented the island as being situated just beyond the Pillars of Hercules (the Strait of Gibraltar).

"Spanush set off last month in a little boat to an area south of Helgoland, off the northwest coast of Germany, which he said closely fits a description by Plato.

"The diver reported the wall was built of rectangular stones, seven feet long and three feet high.

"'I am convinced,' Spanush said, 'that a well-equipped expedition could result in valuable information about these huge buildings of the bronze age which submerged in a world catastrophe'."

Another prediction we can score correct is the one regarding earthquakes made in March, 1952 issue. The recent California earthquakes certainly bore that one out.

Still another: the new type atomic weapon has been announced, although its nature still is kept secret.

Another score: We beat by two months (on the stands) the fact of a new record high in food prices.

But—and this has raised a great fuss among our readers—Harry Tru-

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man will not be our next president! Said a reader (at the recent World Science Fiction Convention in Chicago): "Is your new prediction feature a hoax?" He referred specifically to the Truman prediction. All right, here is the announcement we promised many months ago:

First, we have several purposes in publishing our predictions: (1) An attempt to show that *anyone* can predict with a high degree of accuracy, if he uses logic and is a careful observer of trends. (2) It is possible to make predictions which *cannot* be explained by the factors mentioned in purpose 1. That such predictions are the result of *senses* we do not yet understand, but which are being explored by such scientists as Dr. Rhine of Duke University and by many other groups. It is our purpose to make a *large* number of such predictions which will *prove* that tomorrow is not beyond our reach even when the veil that hangs before it is completely impenetrable to any other process of penetration. (3) The business of making money. The prediction concerning Truman was in this classification. It was neither constituted on reason or logic, and certainly not on trends. It was a blind stab. IF it had come true, by the strangest series of circumstances in history, it would have formed the basis for a *logical* and serious book of prophecy, which would have proven a tremendous financial success. In short, it was the type of gamble on the "big story" that Ray Palmer has always considered his favorite pastime. That it didn't come off is just one of those things. We could have made a lot of money—which we could have well used to make OW even bigger and better!

However, all this doesn't detract from the first two purposes of this column—and since we have had an overwhelming request from our readers to continue it as a *serious* project, with no hocus-pocus, no claims of men from the future, no tricks, we are forced to submit to the will of the majority. But we'll admit, we've got a tough row to hoe.

One thing, we'll predict right here and now that three out of four of our predictions will be accurate!

In a coming issue, we will draw up a scoreboard which will prove that our first two purposes are justified, and that *both* can be done with a very high degree of accuracy. But most of all we will prove that the items falling into classification 2 are sensationally correct.

Our prediction for this month will be a single one, falling into classifications 1 *and* 2. We predict that communication will be established with intelligences beyond our breathable atmosphere, based on not-understood communications ALREADY received! Further, that these intelligent signals have been received since 1942 by one of the most respected and famous of America's electronic engineers. We also predict that every large country in the world will follow America's lead in this new communication effort, and will spend (during

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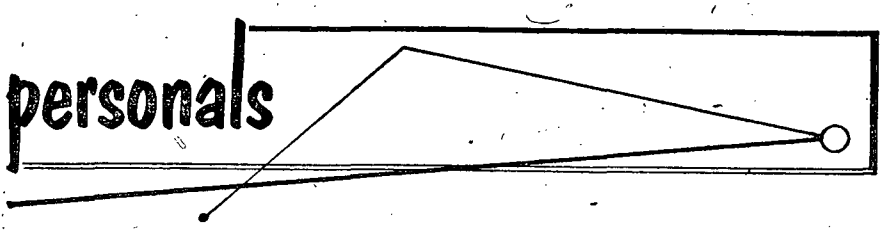

OOPSLA! 10c, 3/30c, 8 & annish/$1, annish 25c, Gregg Calkins, 761 Oakley St, Salt Lake City 16, Utah. Material by Hoffman, Covington, Banks, Conner and other well known fans. 17 pages mimeoed . . . *SCIENCE FANTASY BULLETIN (formerly, BULLETIN Of The Cleveland SF Society); Harlan Ellison, 12701 Shaker Blvd, Apt No. 616, Cleveland 20, Ohio; 15c, 12 issues plus annual for $1.50. Mimeo, anywhere from 30 to 45 pages* . . . Back issues of stf and occult zines; will sell or trade for mags containing Shaver. Have small number of Burroughs, Fort, Velikovsky, and Hubbard books for sale. Would like to correspond with fans interested in Atlantis, the Elder Race, etc. Roger Parris, Box 111, Hayesville, Ohio . . . *OPUS (formerly FANVARIETY); Max Keasler, Box 24, Washington U., St. Louis 5, Mo; 2/25c, 4/50c; 9/$1; mimeo, complete with Max's unusual spelling* . . . Ed Wood, 31 N. Aberdeen St, Chicago 7, Ill. has numerous fanzines for sale at 5c, 10c, 25c, etc. Also, AS 1927-33, plus other pre '45 zines. Send for list . . . *JOURNAL OF SCIENCE FICTION, Charles Freudenthal, 1331 W. Newport Ave, Chicago 13, Ill; 25c, 32 page offset fan mag; material by Bloch, Bradbury, Pomeroy, Gardner, etc* . . . Would like to trade: Unknown Worlds, Dec '41 & Dec '42 and Astounding, Nov '41 for Unknown, Aug, Nov & Dec '39; all '40 but Mar, Aug, Nov & Dec; '41, Apr & Oct; Carnelian Cube. Wm. J. Doherty, Jr., 23 Florence St, Cambridge 39, Mass . . . *QUANDRY, Lee Hoffman, 101 Wagner St, Savannah, Ga; 15c, 3/40c; mimeo, 20 or more pages, neat, dependable* . . . Want back issues of aSF, Unk, FFM. Will buy or trade. Have first issue of AS for trade. Alfred W Purdy, 1846 W 2nd Ave, Vancouver 9, B C, Canada . . . *VIEWS IN SF, Ray J. Sienkiewicz, 802 W 35th St, Baltimore 11, Md; 10c, 3/25c, 12/$1; mimeo, monthly bulletin of the Baltimore Science Fiction Forum* . . . Have for sale or trade: aSF, Sept, Oct and Nov '51. Want OW, 1-4; Galaxy 1, Madge, 1-5. Evan Buck, 12 Huguenot Dr, Larchmont, N Y . . *FANTASY TIMES; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave, Flushing 54, N Y; 10c, 12/$1; mimeo; news-zine now in its 11th year of publication* . . . Will accept bids on the following, special consideration for quantity orders: AS, scattered copies of '39 and

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'48, Spring '49 quarterly, all '49 except July, all '50 and '51; FA, Mar and May thru Sept of '48, Spring '49 Quarterly, all of '49, '50 and '51; miscellaneous copies of TWS, SS, Weird, Super Science, FSQ, Worlds Beyond, Marvel, Future, STF Qtly, Mag of Fantasy, Fantasy Adv, and various pocketbooks. Also have copy of "The New Adam" for sale if top offer is made . . . C H Geist, 2323 W Ainslie St, Chicago 25, Ill . . . *FANTASY CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM, by Alastair Cameron. Can be obtained from Chester D. Cuthbert, 54 Ellesmere Ave, St Vital, Manitoba, Canada. $1; first ed limited to 500 copies; analyses and classifications of basic plots for stf and fantasy* . . . Have excerpts from old pulp size ASF, AS and Wonder. For sale at 15/50c; first order for more than 15 will get a Bluebook excerpt for free. M. McNeil, 2010 McClendon, Houston 25, Texas . . . *RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST, Garden Library, 2524 Telegraph Ave, Berkeley 4, Calif. Published by The Elves', Gnomes' and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder and Marching Society; 30c, 10/$2.50; multilithed* . . . Robert Perkins, Jr, RR 4, Box 54, Beloit, Wisc. will sell seven sf mags, including "Martian Chronicles" at below cost. All in excellent condition . . . *SPACESHIP, Bob Silverberg, 760 Montgomery St, Brooklyn 13, N Y. Quarterly; 10c, 3/25c; mimeo* . . . Will buy or trade for: H P Lovecraft books and pb "The Lurking Fear," pre '49 aSF, Unk, Galaxy, Marvel and OW. Send 6 to 12 stf mags and 25c and I will return an equal number. Will send Coronet or pb mysteries if desired. Have Tarzan series, "Thuvia, Maid of Mars" and "At The Earth's Core"; also Leinster's "Last Space Ship" with d/w. Interested in joining a stf club. John Quagliano, 1653 E 26 St, Brooklyn 29, N Y . . . *ETRON; Chuck Taylor, 1521 Mars, Lakewood 7, Ohio; 25c, 6/$1.25; mimeo; articles, features, stories and art* . . . Newly-formed stf club, The Infinity Science Fiction Club, would like to hear from south-eastern fans interested in a Southeastern conference. Contact Edith Heilweil, 2127 8 Ave N, St Petersburg, Fla. . . . *CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION: Box 1329, Grand Central Station, New York 17, N Y; 15c, 2/25c, 10/$1, 21/$2; mimeo; published weekly, contains fan news* . . . Want 1st ed "Gather Darkness," "Dark Other," "Beyond Infinity," "Genus Homo," "Carnelian Cube," "Cometeers." Must be in excel condit with d/w. Make offer, or will trade "Iron Star," "Green Man of Graypec," "Sign of Burning Hart," "Mislaid Charm," "Novels of Science"; all excel condit with d/w. John Gatto, 42 Oakland Ave, Uniontown, Pa . . . *THE LITTLE CORPUSCLE; Lynn A Hickman, 408 W Bell St, Statesville, North Carolina; 15c, free to members of TLMA and Napoleon Fantasy Club; published at irregular intervals* . . . Wanted: persons residing in continental USA to act as distributors for original stf and fantasy booklets. R. S. Craggs,

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SUN-BATHERS OF EROS

By Marilyn Zimmerman

THIS month's example of artwork by *Other Worlds'* readers is a concept of the beautiful children of the planet of Love disporting themselves in the ether beneath the glowing rays of the sun. Here all is gay abandon, and care has no part in existence.

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DID OTHER WORLDS DISCOVER US FIRST?

Can Oahspe be the authentic and authorized account of the increasingly frequent visits of flying disks and space ships?

FROM the first page of OAHSPE you will find it increasingly hard to believe that Dr. John Ballou Newbrough, deceased, through whose hands this strange book was transcribed seventy years ago, actually wrote it, so different is Oahspe from all other books.

Oahspe shows an array of minds as superior to the minds of Newbrough's time as a flying saucer is superior to the engineering creations of today. On the basis of its literary merits alone, many find Oahspe powerfully convincing, and every day new *external* evidence tends to corroborate Oahspe.

Oahspe purports to have been written at the expressed order of the chief of a band of highly organized beings from other worlds, supposedly many of them older than this earth. These beings call themselves Ethereans, meaning citizens of etherea or space beyond the earth's atmosphere, and they claim not only to have discovered earth long ago, but also to have colonized it, and to have had it in their loving care and management ever since.

In Oahspe, their book, they give the history of their visits to earth, visits of their former expeditionary chiefs like Sethantes, Thor, Appolo, Sue, Osire, and many others whose names are now remembered only in legend if at all, as the names of Buddha, Brahma, Mohamet and others will become legendary in centuries to come.

In Oahspe these ethereans state quite plainly and simply what they think is good for us in this present age of atomic power and universal travel. First, they state what we should repudiate if we would escape misery. Second, what we should embrace and practice if we would be alive and happy. As one of their members states in Oahspe; "I am not come to captivate the ignorant and unlearned. I come to the wise and learned. And not to one man only but to thousands. That which I am uttering in these words in this place, I am also uttering in the souls of thousands, and I will bring them together."

You will, of course, want to examine, judge, and decide for yourself the validity of Oahspe's extensive statements. Decide for yourself just what and who Oahspe represents. And don't we all want to know who on earth is kidding who and why and how?

Oahspe comes in a blue fabrikoid binding. It is a large book of 890 pages illustrated and indexed. Five dollars will bring this Wonder Book of the Age to you postpaid. If you wish it C.O.D. it will cost you five-fifty. If you are not pleased with the book send it back and money will be returned to you immediately. Order from Kosmon Press, 2208 West 11th St., Los Angeles 6, California.

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LETTERS

CLARK PUBLISHING COMPANY, 806 DEMPSTER STREET, EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

William F. Hall

I just read your feature "Nebulosities." It is something unusual in the field of wild speculation. Yes, despite your "logic" and "proof," I call it *wild*.

The first thing I'd like to get my teeth into is your statement: "Most history is fiction." You arrived at this not-so-uncommon conclusion by stating that history is continually being revised by the political crew then in power. *Not* true. Only the *outlook* has been changed. There is, in almost every instance, too much documented proof on hand to allow obliteration or, as you put it, "editing out." Much of history is *inferred*, unearthed by circumstantial evidence which makes the basic conclusion inevitable. Only the small pieces can be "edited out."

Next thing, you say not only that the A-bomb tests have changed our weather, but that they were the cause of the Kansas and Missouri floods. Gads! If *that's* not wild speculation, maybe we'd better call back in the guy who said the Earth was flat! Listen: Our weather is slightly effected *locally* by percussion waves originating from the tests, but otherwise, they can and have caused *O* weather changes. How *could* they?

Re your next paragraph, if we knew how we could have war, we wouldn't have it. Half the cure of a disease is in finding the cause.

Next, you glibly state that the recent quakes were due to the A-bomb tests. Do you know just how "terrific" the impact of even a super A-bomb is, compared with what is required to cause the smallest of quakes? Do you know how many millions of tons of pressure must be placed on a fault before there is a shift of *any* kind? If your "terrific" A-bomb blasts had the effect you suppose, Southern Cal. would have been buried beneath the sea centuries ago from natural causes!

In your last paragraph you say: "No city was ever built that was not destroyed, no civilization that did not fall, no culture that did not degenerate." But few indeed are the cities which weren't *re*-built; few the cultures that did not regenerate; few the civilizations that did not *rise again!* Surely, Rome fell. But what is America if not a Roman Republic? What is Russia but a prototype of ancient Sparta?

You see, the phoenix is more than a bird of legend. It is the symbol of all life, all thought. For those cultures, those civilizations, those philos-

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ophies are born and reborn in the minds of men. They echo and re-echo down the endless corridors of time.

I know you were just gassing, but *please* stick closer to the facts. Stop treating honest logic as though it were your worst enemy!

I *like* your magazine.

1657 Ocean Ave.,
Santa Monica, Calif.

What is "history" in Germany today? Is it the books Hitler destroyed? Is it the hangover of the Superman propaganda? Is it the "truth" being disseminated on both sides of the Iron Curtain by all the conquering powers? Can you, in the midst of all this confusion, find the actual pathway of history? Can you DOCUMENT one single bit of it? I say it is impossible—and the future will regard it in an even more confused light. Propaganda, not history!

We just plain disagree with you on the A-bomb and weather. And we aren't alone. Try reading Colliers and the Post . . .

How we have wars? Easy. Selfish, greedy men. And PROPAGANDA.

Earthquake scientists predict quakes by watching the "build-up" of pressure on known faults. And will you deny the "punch" of the A-bomb is insufficient to trigger a loaded gun?

By your reasoning, the Cro-Magnon did not vanish—he is America today. Same guy, same civilization—regenerated. Nuts. You are mistaking new civilizations for resurgences of old ones. If we build a new city on the site of Troy, is it Troy all over again? And what about the eleven cities under Troy, whose inhabitants and civilization we have not the slightest inkling as to identity or nature?—Rap.

Klaus Kaufman

OTHER WORLDS! . . . and yet, in reading your features the Earth seems to be the only world in question. In your editorial we learn these facts: the atomic dust and snow is bringing about floods and unusual weather, the air is poisoned, we're ready for the grave.

We learn of the terrible fate your bushes were involved in. Your farm is ruined!

Another feature, NEBULOSITIES, paints more of the same. Our Democratic way of life is fast fading. A volcano has erupted; this proves that the Earth is exploding in slow motion. For those impatient souls: the Earth is exploding slowly, but give it time, remember, patience is a virtue.

All this may be true, but why must you insist on publishing these grim facts in your magazine. We all read for our entertainment. We read features to smile and laugh. Instead, we find ourselves bathed in cold sweat, watching the sunsets, closing our windows to keep out the poisoned air. This is surely the end!

Mr. Rap, a question. If the end is so near *why do you continue publishing* OTHER WORLDS, or maybe you plan to move to Mars? The natives will get a kick out of the mag.

1 Water St.,

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Newburgh, N. Y.

We are merely being brave, carrying on as if the end wasn't near!

—Rap.

C. E. Williams

Greetings Palmer, you're an outspoken cuss, a non-conformer, and maybe a dam fool, but I'll buy you on the newsstands anytime.

To elucidate: You're outspoken at a time when policy seems to dictate "what I see, I observe and remember (maybe) but just 'cause I don't agree I don't go round bitching about it" —not even to try and make it better. In rapping old uncle's knucks, the politicians, the super-conformist, the socialistic tendencies, etc., you've set something of a precedent. None of us agree one hundred percent with Uncle Sam, the politicos, graft, corruption and the like but of all the books or mags I read you are the only dam guy with guts enough to say so—in writing.

Non-conformer? Please show me the conformist who ever had an original thought, who ever pioneered, in history, in development, in science, or even in politics? Which way is there but down when everybody conforms?

I said maybe a dam fool, that sticks, but not like it sounds . . . could be you're a little business man —like me, and maybe those big-pressure groups won't like what you've been saying, or how you say it, before a public, and maybe 'cause they don't like it they can pressure you into doing something silly like maybe becoming a conformist—maybe to get paper, or labor or something, maybe that makes you a dam fool for flaunting your ideas (and mine) in the influence of all those big interests, but by god that don't keep you from being right—I just hope they can't catch you in that old tight spot. Don't be a dam fool rap, be RIGHT and *STILL* WIN!

So much for axe grinding, now for a plot. In the Naked Godess you've scored highest. Good story, nuff said, I'm sure you liked it too—but—there you go—non-conformist again, everybody else refers to Warp Drive, Atomics, or just plain jet fuel . . . this is the *first* story in *any* sf mag in the last seven months to base the drive of the story on the drive of a ship in which the basis for travel was electrical! Were you unaware of this trend away from Electrical possibilities? Atomics might provide *drive*. They could never provide protection from meteors, force screens, light the ship or provide internal power. Warp drive is so deviationist nobody could begin to explain what it uses . . . not that drive is SO important to the story, except that in most cases the author tries to give the impression of travel in order to hold the story together . . . so OK . . . look at today's bomber or other large, fast aircraft. If it's so fast human error is done away with by electro-servo-mechanisms, sometimes connected with radar, radio, etc. . . . all electrical, a space ship is going to go faster yet, huh? OK, re-

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fine your mechanisms, provide for adequate generation or storage of large amounts of electricity, and you have the power requirements needed for operational stability, light, heat and refrigeration — the only thing lacking then? DRIVE!

My contention is that Electricity has some very dark, unexplored alleys, not one, but several—two for example . . . an efficient storage battery, and negative electricity. Or if you want to get complicated, hi-frequency plus combination of types of electricity, a-c, d-c and neg.

How to get drive? Well, what characteristics MUST you have—a few, instantaneous control, positive action, controlability, safety . . . *only* electricity offers these things to us; it's the only thing fast enough to offer them at high speeds. Perhaps electricity is the first step on a two-step ladder . . . but emember the "old Doc Methuselah" series in-asf? He had a ship (what a ship) that was pretty much the ONLY possibility as far as practicability. It seemed to combine hovering, overdrive, etc., was very flying saucerish in the abilities to swoop, speed up, slow down et al.

Perhaps nullifying gravity will be enough—at first, then the pioneers will find they need protection for cold, heat, meteors, dust, cosmic rays or something and another facet of the dormant powers of electricity will be brought to light. First the drive, then the safety factor, a shield or screen to stop those rays! One thing's fer sure, when spacing comes, it'll come from electricity or a take-off from electricity. It's the only weapon we have that can also be called a tool.

I can say it needs doing, I can say what needs to be done, I can even chart out a course to the goal that has to be reached, but I lack that all important combination of factors dear old Edison had, someone'll have 'em sometime soon, and they'll read this—or something like it, and get the bug.

For what it's worth RAP I'd like to see you lend your obvious talents to creating a feature length novel based on the type of equipment and techniques described above. Believe it would be good.

In a recent editorial you mentioned women on your covers—seems to me the answer to that one is simple . . . the only MAN not interested in a woman, or women is the one who's dead, and your circulation doesn't go to graveyards. Let the prudes whisper, rave and raise hell, you'll go on selling more mags if you include a little sex interest in.

1100 West Main,
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Wouldn't trying to squelch me prove I was right—and isn't that what they'd want to avoid? As for that plot for an electrical novel, maybe one of our writers who can write will take up the idea. Speaking of sex, how do you like the DeMille bathtub scene on the cover? And it isn't dragged into the story—the whole story depends on it!—Rap.

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Charles F. Albrecht, Jr.

I have been reading "Other Worlds" for about two years and I have enjoyed all your stories. I have also enjoyed all of your covers. That is the main reason why I have written you. Why don't you make 8"x10" reproductions of your swell covers, I know that many persons besides myself would like to own them. Let me know the possibilities of this idea.

Hq. Sq. 3650th, BMTG,
Sampson, AFB, N. Y.

It would cost a young fortune! A set of plates of that size would cost $500.00 printing about $250.00. And we'd probably sell a couple hundred at 25c. But, you must note that we've begun giving you front and back covers suitable for framing as is. So, haven't we complied with your request, except as to size!—Rap.

Erma Simon

About *Other Worlds*: it's stupendous! Magnificent! Astounding! Incredible! Marvelous! Fantastic! Fabulous! In fact, I like it! People tell me I'm hard to please, so that's a compliment. The new paper is terrif! Glad you're using the two-cover format too—nice.

Hang on to Hornstein—he's got something on the ball. But, just one question. Why no Bradbury? Even reprints? Every mag should have a Bradbury saga once in a while!

For Nebulosities: Somebody predicted jet transports by 1958. I think he's off his rocker. No jet transport company could operate at a profit; at least not with present-day fuels. Which brings up possible story plot: first commercial jet transport company succeeds in spite of high costs, general public resistance to new ideas, rival company with capital operating "old-type" combustion engine planes. Give it to one of the pros—I'm just an amateur writer myself.

By the way, give Harmon my vote for president, provided he runs on a platform of fewer serials, more shorts, a bigger OW, and a flying saucer in every garage. Election slogan: What this country needs is a good 5c stf mag!! Hurrah! Hurrah! (Other fans, I am sure, cheering in the background.)

As a matter of fact, this is the first fan letter I ever wrote—but it sure is fun.

Again orchids to you and OW and here's to an even bigger and better mag!

R. D. 1,
Scenery Hill, Pa.

You haven't seen anything but a few Hornstein sketches so far—wait until you see the illustrations he's got coming up!—Rap.

Pvt. Gunther Wallenda

Just finished the October issue of OTHER WORLDS and made up my mind that I would try my hand at writing a few lines to you, and let you know how much I like your mag.

I am one of those guys that has been reading science-fiction for about 15 years, but not being too handy with a typewriter I never got up the

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nerve to write.

I do think that your mag. is one of the best in the field and haven't missed any issues so far.

Your editorials I really enjoy even if I don't agree with all of them, but last time you really went to town on one of my pet peeves, mainly the A-bomb, not that I have anything against the Bomb itself but the constant denial of the fact that it couldn't possibly affect the weather and even the people. I remember just last week reading that where the bombs were dropped in Japan during the last war, the birthrate of girls is way ahead of boys at the present time. How can that be explained if the radiation itself isn't supposed to be strong enough after a short time to affect us?

Now another thing I'm interested in, the flying saucers—natch, I have a pet idea of mine on that too. Instead of it being "weather balloons or certain planets" there is a chance that we perhaps have built and launched one or more space stations? It could be possible and they would certainly be able to reflect the sun at night when they are in a favorable position. That would also account for the speed seen in the flying saucers.

Now for the stories in the last issue. The SUN-SMITHS I liked best, then came THE NAKED GODDESS, FEARLESS FERGY, and I didn't like LAST MINUTE. Of course I realize that different people like different stories and I don't expect you to put out a mag. just to please my taste like a lot of letters I have read where the writer seems to believe just because he likes one type of story you should only print that type.

I see where a lot of the other mags. are copying your idea of allowing the printing of other mags. name in the letter column, and I think that's a good thing. It makes everything a little friendlier to me.

Now a suggestion. How about putting an address at the head of your letter list so a person can see where to send this letter.

Wd. "25" U. A. Hosp.
Ft. Jackson, S. C.

No sooner said than done.—Rap.

Ron Smith

Here it is a dreary 10:00 p.m. I'm tired, but instead of going to bed like I should, what do I do? Write you a letter. I sat down here at the typewriter with a sort of hypnotic stare in my eyes and started typing. Why? I wondered. The fact is, I'm just fascinated by OTHER WORLDS. I wish it came out weekly instead of monthly.

But now that I think about it, it isn't OTHER WORLDS that holds my interest, it's *you*. The way you handle her, shape her, put yourself into her and give her life. I've really never seen an editor yith your approach to magazine editing. Most of them edit as if they were *working*, but you seem to like what you're d-o-i-n-g. That makes OTHER WORLDS a sort of different magazine; she's alive, that I'm sure of.

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She has a personality all her own; your personality. Why don't you give FATE the treatment you give her?

So you're going to publish the Shaver Mystery? Let me know the price, and I'll buy a copy now.

It is true that our particular culture can't survive eternity. All civilizations possess their own seed of destruction; and the people water and feed and nurse that seed. It grows and eventually chokes out that civilization. It has always happened like that in the past, I only hope it won't ALWAYS happen in the future. Maybe some day we'll catch on to ourselves and learn how to think right. We ought to face reality though, and realize that it isn't likely to happen with our culture, we are just being naive in thinking so.

People don't understand themselves. Practically all of civilization says it doesn't want war; a great majority of it really BELIEVES it doesn't want war. But the truth is, it must be, that a majority of the peoples do want war. Otherwise there wouldn't be any. Too bad everybody isn't a psychologist. Or do psychologists want war too?

To change the subject to OTHER WORLDS: The "Sun-Smiths" was an A-plus story. The back cover was again very good, but I do think an explanation, or a story, is in order. Maybe a stf poem, or at least a *title* to the things.

The front cover was excellent. But damn it, where did you get the bright idea for a spaceship? If this is the effect it's going to have, you had better quit reading QUICK. After all, YOU got to see it before Malcolm got happy with his pen. I'll sit and sigh over this cover for another couple of minutes now, before I forget it; I like pretty girls too.

Your new series of articles is excellent.

I've said how much I enjoy your editorials. Please come up with some idea I will disagree with. It's very disconcerting not to find something to make me think you're nuts. Everybody thinks everybody else is nuts, you know.

Congratulations on going monthly.

332 E. Date
Oxnard, Calif.

We'll try to have some sort of story with our back covers. November we explained in the editorial. As a matter of fact, some of our future back covers are going to illustrate stories in the magazine! As for being jealous of us, we're jealous of Malcolm Smith—you see, he takes the pictures; And not just one, but dozens of poses, before he gets one we're satisfied with. Art directors are so lucky.

—Rap.

Peter Kreeft

This is my first letter to any sf mag as I am only 15 and have been a fan for only a few months, but I feel I must write you re the wonderful *and horrible* condition of your mag.

Your stories are tops except for just one thing: serials. I hate 'em! I hate 'em! I hate 'em! And so do 90 percent of the rest of the sf fans. Why

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not substitute a novella or two, complete in one issue, instead? Please, *please, PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE* CUT IT OUT! Serials are driving me nuts!

Your feature, The Man from Tomorrow is terrific. Keep it up. Your predictions are better than Jules Verne's, H. G. Wells,' & Walter Winchell's all put together. Our scientists ought to take them seriously and really get to work on them.

Now Rap, if you want to be an ostrich, as you suggest in Oct. OTHER WORLDS (Nebulosities, p. 155, 156), go right ahead. As for the rest of the world, we'll go on "wrecking the future" by inventing new and better things for the benefit of the world. If, as you suggest, everyone had done that, we would be in the Stone Age yet. Whassa matter with you? If we were all like that there would be no science fiction! And that is one of the most horrible punishments possible for an sf fan. Why would there be no sf? Why, with no new advancements in technology, civilization, and culture to look forward to in the future, would anyone write about the future? Please, Rap, be reasonable.

I dare you to print this letter!

26 Richardson Ave.,
Haledon, N. J.

Our serial policy will modify from time to time—but meanwhile, we think you'll find it worthwhile to save the issues and read the serial when you have it complete. They are going to be terrific stories! Dare us? Why any letter fit to be written is fit to be published. We just try to make the LETTERS section interesting by selection.—Rap.

Robert D. McNamara

Just received the October issue of OW and must say it was a good one. I thought that you had reached a peak of some sort with the August number, back cover and all, but you seemed to have beaten it this time. Not only were the front and back covers superior to those of the other, but the paper was wonderful, extremely easy to read. Nevertheless, there has been quite a drop in the interior 'illos; following in the steps of IMAGINATION you've made them too sketchy, and without enough detail. Try to get some Cartier, for though Charles Hornstein's works were good, the rest were a little below mediocre. "PEOPLE WHO MAKE OTHER WORLDS" was as usual, good. I've read so many autobiographies of de Camp, however, on the back of his books and periodicals he is featured in, that I feel I know all there is to know about him—the photo was exceptional, though. Now for the stories—

Definitely best in the issue was T. P. Caravan's beautiful little gem of comical farcity, "LAST MINUTE." I've never heard of Caravan's name before, but if he can keep turning out wonderful pieces like this I'll be looking forward to seeing more and longer stories by him in future issues.

Coming in second was Richard S. Shaver's thrill-packed conclusion of

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the "Sun-Smiths." I've commented in it before, so suffice it to say that it was worthy of Shaver at his best. Am a little doubtful, however, about your judgment in picking another Shaver serial to succeed this immediately. You can push a good thing too far; if you're going to keep forcing Shaver's serials on the readers issue after issue, invariably good as they are, you're going to find a lot of fans fed up to the ears with him and stopping buying.

"THE NAKED GODDESS" by S. J. Byrne and "FEARLESS FERGY" rank together for third and fourth place, with the latter, I think, a little superior to Byrne's piece. Both good however.

L. Sprague de Camp's article was good; but merely that. I'm probably just a little tired of that type of article, I imagine, having just completed reading "NEW LANDS" but I still think that de Camp could be a little less confusing. Not that the article itself is hard to decipher, merely that by the time you've got the names of the various Greek characters associated in your mind you've forgotten that a place like Atlantis ever existed. (If it did exist!)

"NEBULOSITIES" is probably your best feature, and I certainly hope you continue it. When you cut out the hocus-pocus of things (that's the only word I have for it) like "THE MAN FROM TOMORROW" and merely expound your own ideas and theories, exceptionally worthy themselves, for what they are —yours, then you have an article worthy of your by-line.

As I mentioned "Man" above—I might as well review it next, though I find no entertainment in reading this rather sorry attempt at sensationalism. It wouldn't be too bad if you'd quit trying to convince the readers that this is not your writing, but a citizen of the future speaking from your lips. And don't object and say you don't actually say that is the TRUTH—I can see how those sly inferences and often pointed remarks are meant to affect the reader psychology. Oh, you're a smart one, Palmer! But McNamara is wise to you. And as for your actual predictions, why quite simply there aren't any. Each issue you keep promising to reveal something in the next—then stall them for a time in that number. "Prophecies" like citing the always capricious weather as having something queer about it, and then in a tremendous exposé misquoting weather reports that never would have been corrected if it weren't for a fan who luckily lived in the area. And your mild predictions such as saying H.S.T. would corner the Convention, are so inconsequential that when proven wrong the reader merely says, "Well, there's one wrong, but Ray probably interjected that himself instead of listening to what the Man from Tomorrow told him. So it says here that there's going to be a rise of an unprecedented 2.68 in the grain market of Masatonia, eh? Gad, better put that startling bit of information on my chart!" A. Merritt once said, RAP, that if you're going to write a

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fantasy story, have it in a setting in Mongolia, or in some other uncheckable spot. That's exactly what you're doing ed, to your evident gain but to many of we readers' serious dissatisfaction.

Well, despite a few hard words, old horse, you've put out an excellent issue, and though I'll continue to disapprove of features like "The Man From Tomorrow" and its ilk, I shall still remain a faithful reader. Keep up the good work, and schedule that Bok cover for the near, ve-ry near future, please!

50 Plaza St.,
Brooklyn 17, N. Y.

We aren't following in the steps of IMAGINATION. Why, after what that guy, Hamling, did to us at the convention . . . ! Gave us a plaque, he did. Embarrassed us in front of all those 1050 people! Lucky he was only acting for the Convention Committee! Sure, we'll make the illustrations less sketchy—just to get even with Hamling! But Hornstein—you'll be raving about him soon! Shaver serials are rare. It just so happens he wrote two at once . . . ! Coming up soon are other guys—even complete novels in one issue! See Man From Tomorrow, this issue. No hocus-pocus. But honest; aren't we producing even one teeny prediction which lays it on the line? Guess we gotta recapitulate and mark up the score some more . . . —Rap.

The International Flying Saucer Bureau

This is to inform you of an organization formed to collect data and history in connection with the Flying Saucers.

Anyone may become a member, age is no drawback. We are trying to get all Saucer-Minded people banded together in one big organization.

I would appreciate all you can do to help us.

I understand you are quite an authority on the Saucers and would like it very much if you would consider an honorary Life Membership in our society.

I have been reading "Other Worlds" ever since the first issue hit the newsstands and I must admit it is TOPS on my list, and you can quote me if you desire.

Albert K. Bender,
President,
P. O. Box 241,
Bridgeport 2, Conn.

Glad to help. Also, the membership is an honor.—Rap.

Rosco Wright

What happened to OTHER WORLDS? I know it's nice of you to get smoother paper but the printer gave you the brownest and the worst and not only that he or you threw this issue together so fast that the interior layout is about the ugliest in the history of science-fiction. Why?

This was the most uninteresting issue you ever put out. As a printer and as an artist I think you ought to let me plan your layout for you—on second thought why don't you hire

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me to be your boss—or let Bea do the layout—or was it the new monthly schedule this time? For 35 cents I WANT SOPHISTICATED LAYOUT. You might look at some modern advertising. This issue of OW looks like something that wouldn't even sell in the deadest decade before the gay nineties. And another thing. I like the back cover idea BUT this second one by Jones has terrible balance, nothing but a hack idea and poor coloring. It is far inferior to the first one. You want that I should paint your cover too? Jones' little technique was pretty good on the first cover. The next one had better be good and while you are at it why don't you switch to a four plate process? It will improve your newsstand appearance immensely. My motto is "Babes look better on four plates."

Well? What are you going to do about it?

146 East 12th Ave.,
Eugene, Ore.

Well, how do you like the appearance of this issue? Sure, we were in a horrible haste on the October issue. Didn't even have our department cuts due to shifting printers. We slapped it together frantically, because somehow we got all fouled up on dates, which is why we skipped the September issue. But now, we got a new dress, our art director is working nights, and we will sophisticate you right out of your bed! How'd you like November back cover? And Jones on this one? As for four-color plates, you sure spend our money fast! Take it easy, we'll get around to it.—Rap.

Fred Goetz

The rapidly increasing popularity of tape and wire recorders has given rise to a new and most fascinating hobby—Tape-respondence or Wire-spondence.

I'm an old-time science fiction reader, and it occurred to me that this hobby would be of especial interest to my fellow readers, be they active fans or not.

Talking and listening to people from everywhere is a tremendous thrill, I know, because I've exchanged well over 1,200 "Talking Letters" with many people in this and 18 foreign countries. Although many of my friends live thousands of miles away I know more about them, their families, their work, their every-day affairs than I do about the people living in the next apartment. In fact, my "Talking Letters" friends mean just as much to me as do my personal friends of many years' standing.

In response to numerous requests I am now forming an organization, TAPE-RESPONDENTS, INTERNATIONAL.

Membership is open to all. There is no obligation. Anyone who has a friendly disposition and a recorder (tape or wire) may join.

Join T-R-I today! Get in touch with me by tape, by wire, or by letter. I'll be glad to have your ideas and suggestions.

3488 22nd Street,
San Francisco 10, Calif.

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Any of you fans got the equipment? Sounds like it would be fun! —Rap.

Richard Fugett

Your covers stink,
Your features smell;
Your stories are bad,
And the editorials aren't so hot, either.

972 Gretna Green,
Los Angeles 49, Calif.

Will any of our readers who may have some knowledge of the magazine to which this interesting letter should have been directed, please inform us, so that we can forward it? Obviously it does not refer to us. Perhaps it is a joke? We cannot say we know of a single magazine in this particular category. Perhaps it is Russian propaganda!—Rap.

Tom Reamy

Well, at last you got the mag to looking all right on the outside; now try working on the inside. Here are some suggestions which you will immediately do the opposite: (1) Throw all the Terry illos you got on hand into the nearest waste-basket where they belong. How bad can an artist get? I know, Terry showed me. There's no use in my suggesting some artists to get because it's been done innumerable times; and what happens? The next issue is full of Terry. What is he? A relative?

(2) Start skipping an issue between serials. Galaxy has started skipping two issues, which is better still. You'll be hearing about this.

(3) Have Jones write an explanation about his paintings, which, by the way, would look better on the front than the ones you put there.

Oh yeah! Way back when—in 50 I think, you said that you were going to start a department like the Analytical Laboratory in aSF. It hasn't showed up yet. Seems like you promised it for the next issue.

When I read in your August editorial that you were going to start another Byrne serial, I was all set to go into a chair throwing rage. But, it turned out that it wasn't a serial but, a short novel all in one piece. I began to cool down. Then I saw the announcement for the Shaver serial. Duck!

General Delivery,
Andrews, Texas.

Okay, we've got Henry Sharp, McCauley, Fuqua, Tillotson, Bok, Jones, St. John, Hornstein, Settles, and others coming up. Rest easy. Also, our serial policy isn't a policy—you'll get variation. And we did put Jones on the front cover last issue. He'll be there again in March. Analytically, we'll keep that promise, too, eventually. We've been so *busy . . . — Rap.*

The Junior Flying Saucer League

After reading most all of the magazines out concerning "flying saucers" I, personally, think that the article you had last January in OTHER WORLDS by Kenneth Arnold is the finest I have ever read. Our club, The Junior "Flying Saucer" League

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of Investigations, has a large library on the "saucers" and we treasure the one in OTHER WORLDS mostly.

Our teen-age league is trying to get members all over the U. S. If any teen-ager would like to join the club, write to me at the address below.

Max B. Miller,
1420 S. Ridgeley Dr.,
Los Angeles 19, Calif.

The MAN From TOMORROW

(Concluded from page 142)

1953) *ten million-dollars* on new electronic equipment designed for receiving such messages from space!

We predict that OTHER WORLDS will carry an article in the near future which will PROVE the work already done in this field, and will name names, places, dates.

We are not alone in this area of space!

—Rap.

PERSONALS

(Concluded from page 144)

25 McMillan Ave, West Hill, Ontario, Canada . . . *CRITI-Q; Stephen Craig, Box 89, Runnemede, N J; 10c; published irregularly; mimeo . . .*

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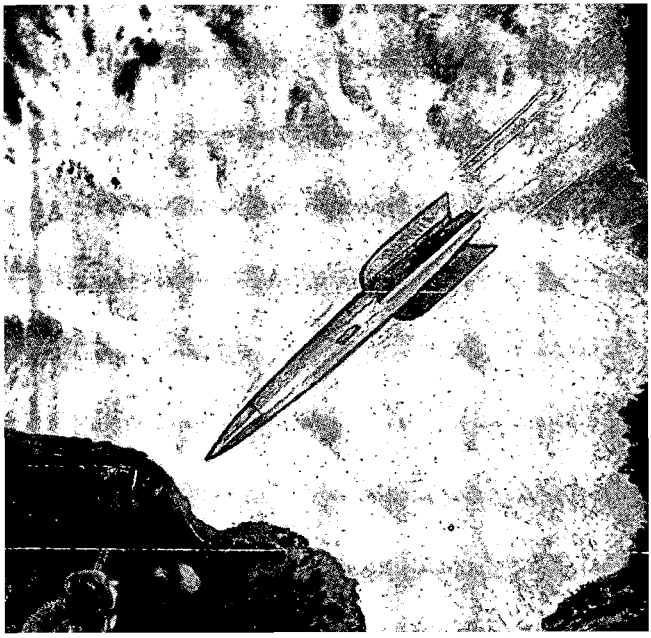

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